

## **Far Too Young by Elizabeth Deadtree**

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**Summary:** Madeleine Henderson had absolutely no intention to fall in love with one of her best friends. She also had no intentions of going head-to-head with a demogorgon. Or demodogs. Or basically anything that required fighting supernatural monsters. And yet, here she was, doing all of the above - just not necessarily in that order. (Steve Harrington/OC)

# 1. Chapter 1

She forced fresh air into her lungs, willing her legs to go faster. She could feel the ache in her thighs start to creep in, and she knew it was only a matter of time before it would reach the rest of her. She turned the corner, slowing slightly before returning to her previous pace. Someone was screaming at her, but she couldn't quite tell who. Her hair whipped the back of her neck in the wind, and she could hear heavy breathing getting closer to her.

*Shit.*

She tried to stretch her legs a little more, hoping to lengthen her stride. Her legs were burning now, but she continued to push herself, knowing that she couldn't slow down now. She rounded another corner, letting a huff of air out.

*In through the nose, out through the mouth.*

Footsteps were accompanying the breathing now, and she knew she only had limited time until the distance between them disappeared. She could feel her hands start to get stiff as the chilliness of the air found its way to her fingers as sweat rolled down the back of her neck, the irony not lost on her. She reached for the last bit of strength she had left and picked her pace up ever so slightly. It was enough, and she could see the end. She pumped her legs and leaned forward just a tad as she crossed the white line, and she let her legs slow down as she bent over, gasping.

A man in athletic gear nodded in approval as he clicked a stop watch.

"Not bad, Henderson. Not bad at all. You sure you don't want to join my team?"

Madeleine Henderson straightened, a slight smirk on her face as she wiped the sweat from her forehead with the edge of her Hawkins Athletics t-shirt.

"Sorry, Coach, but I hardly have time for myself, let alone track."

Coach Smith smiled back. "Well, there's still a month or two until our season actually starts, so let me know if you change your mind."

She nodded, making her way back towards the gym. "Will do!"

Madeleine peeled her sweaty clothes off, claiming an open shower stall before any of the other girls could. She let the water run over her for a moment, getting used to the temperature before pouring shampoo into her hand. She heard the door open and chatter fill the locker room and she rinsed out her hair, grabbing her towel as she stepped into the bathroom. She nodded politely at Nancy Wheeler as she passed the girl on the way towards her locker.

She only knew Nancy through association, talking to her when they had crossed paths because of their brothers, but she felt rude if she didn't give an acknowledgement to the girl. She dried her hair with a towel as she sat on a bench, droplets from her wavy brown locks flying as she shook it out. Madeleine was blessed with P.E. being her last period, and she walked past the boys' basketball practice as she made her way out to the parking lot. The squeaking of shoes floated past her as she kept her head down, and she heard the coach calling a play as the boys lined up.

"Look out!" She looked up at the warning, her breath catching in her throat as a basketball hurtled past her, skimming the tip of her nose as it slammed into the wall. She touched her nose, then turned to glare at the boy who stood with his hands up, an apologetic smile on his face.

"I'm so sorry, are you okay?" he babbled, taking a step towards her. She crossed her arms as she continued to stare daggers at Steve Harrington. She didn't *know* him really, only what she heard, but this was hardly a stellar first impression to counteract the rumors.

"I'd be better if you knew how to catch a pass," she snapped before adjusting the bag on her shoulder and continuing out of the gym. He looked taken aback and watched her leave with his hands on his hips, his teammates snickering behind him. He turned to the boy next to him, dipping his head towards the retreating girl.

"Who the hell is that?"

The other boy laughed and clapped Steve on the back. "I don't know, dude, but you sure pissed her off."

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Madeleine sighed as she leaned against the counter, strands of hair fluttering before settling in front of her eyes. Mrs. Byers had caught her on the way in, and Maddie couldn't very well say no to her when she asked to cover her shift. She knew the Byers well between working with Joyce and Dustin being friends with Will, and the younger boy's disappearance had the family on edge. She had seen Jonathon at school, putting up posters for Will. He looked exhausted, and the same purple bags that drooped underneath his eyes hung from Mrs. Byers'. Picking up a second shift was the least she could do for them.

The bell above the door rung loudly as someone entered the store. Maddie narrowed her eyes as she watched the curly head of her brother make a beeline to the chip aisle and then across the store to the candy aisle. She crossed her arms as he dropped an armful of junk food on the checkout counter, giving her a toothless grin.

"Let me guess, party meeting?"

"Actually, dear sister of mine, party outing." She raised an eyebrow.

"And where, pray tell, do you think your outing will be going?"

Dustin shifted his weight from foot to foot nervously. "Ummm.... To look for clues about Will's disappearance and possibly find him. But you can't tell anyone! Especially Mom! Maddie, I'm serious about this shit," he finished, leaning towards her slightly as if to emphasize the seriousness of what he was saying.

Maddie sighed. "Where does she think you're going?"

Dustin gave a guilty smile as he rummaged through his pockets for change. "Sleepover at Mike's."

She shook her head and began to scan the items, staying quiet. Dustin watched her in anticipation, waiting for a response. She bagged up the food and set it on the counter, leaning on her hands as she made

eye contact with her little brother. Finally, she sighed and held up her hand, ticking a list off on her fingers of what the rules were.

"First of all, you never separate from each other. Second, you will call me before you leave and when you get back. Third, if you find anything, and I mean *anything*, of significance about Will, you call the police. Got it?"

Dustin nodded excitedly, his hair bouncing as she handed him the grocery bag. He hugged her, or at least tried to over the counter, and practically bounced towards the exit.

"Thank you, Maddie! You're the best! And you can keep the change!" He yelled over his shoulder as he stepped through the door.

"Damn straight I can keep the change," she muttered to herself, punching a few numbers into the cash register.

The rest of her shift proved uneventful, with the exception of a dropped pickle jar by a two-year-old. Maddie clocked out and changed back into her street clothes, tossing a wave towards Mr. Harris as she stepped out of the store, heading to her truck. She sighed as she got in, starting the vehicle and turning down Main Street. All she currently wanted was a hot shower and some good food before she had to sit and wait for Dustin to call her.

She put on her blinker, turning the corner before slamming on her brakes. She thumped her hand on the horn, startling the boy in front of her. Maddie narrowed her eyes as she rolled down the window and stuck her head out.

"Hey, asshole! Watch where you're going!"

Steve Harrington looked at her in confusion as he pulled his headphones off.

"Yeah, you! I almost ran your sorry ass over, Harrington. Now move out of the damn road so I can drive," Maddie said with a huff, before flopping back into her seat. He rolled his eyes and put his headphones back on, throwing his hand up in a wave as he finished crossing the street.

Two run-ins with "King Steve" was *not* good luck, at least to Maddie. Especially when those run-ins happened in the same day, and both involved someone almost dying. Okay, maybe she didn't almost die from the basketball, but that was all relative.

She made it home without any other experiences of almost hitting someone and settled in for a long night of pre-cal and waiting for Dustin to call. Rather than calling, he came home at an ungodly hour, the slamming of the door startling Maddie from her sleep, pre-cal notes fluttering to the floor as she stood. Dustin walked through the living room silently, his head down until Maddie flipped a lamp on. She cleared her throat, wanting to know her brother's explanation for coming home, alone, so late, but any argument died in her throat at a small snuffle that he let out.

"Dusty?"

He turned to her, wet trails down his cheeks, and stumbled towards her. Maddie opened her arms to catch him as he crumpled on the ground, sobs wracking his small body. Maddie just held him to her, rocking slightly as she waited for him to talk, both of them staying quiet to avoid waking their mother. He finally let out a final hiccup and lifted his head to Maddie, wiping at his nose. She wiped some of the moisture from his face with the edges of her sleeves and waited for him to say something.

His lip trembled slightly as he opened his mouth.

"It's Will."

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The next few days came and went, with the only news being the body of Will Byers being found in the quarry. Dustin didn't seem to be around the house much, but she could hardly blame him. She figured that he could use the support of his friends right now and would come to her if he needed it, which he did. To ask for help with his tie for the funeral.

"Do you believe in multiple dimensions?"

Her hands stilled for a moment before continuing. "Like what,

exactly?"

"Like, could there be a dimension that's the same as ours but different. You know, theoretically. I don't know, you're in Physics and all, so I thought you might know something."

Maddie shrugged slightly as she pulled the tie. "Theoretically, sure. But we don't really talk about it much in Physics. Why don't you ask Mr. Clarke? I bet he would have some better insight than me."

Dustin's eyes lit up at her suggestion, like she had divulged newfound scientific explorations to him. "Of course, Mr. Clarke! Why didn't I think of him?"

Maddie chuckled, ruffling her little brother's hair as she stood. He scowled as he attempted to smooth it down, looking into the mirror as he straightened the unruly curls.

"Hey, how you holdin' up there, kid?"

He shrugged, bending over to tie his shoelaces. "I don't know, fine I guess." Dustin straightened and looked at Maddie's unconvinced face. "I mean, I'm upset. Totally heartbroken. I don't even know what to do with my tiny, prepubescent self."

Maddie shook her head. "Whatever, weirdo. I'm here if you ever want to talk, okay?"

Dustin gave her a small smile. "I know."

She gave him a hug, squeezing him slightly. "Love you, kiddo."

"Love you too, Mads."

**A/N: Here we go! I know it's kinda short, but the next chapter will be longer and much better. Sooo this is my new Stranger Things story! I know that Dustin's sister has been done before, but the lack of Steve stories on here makes my heart sad, so instead of updating Short Circuit like the trash person I am, I'm writing this. Updates will prob be different, depending on free time, workload, etc., but I hope you liked the first chapter! I'll try to get the next one up ASAP, but please let me know what**

**you think in the reviews and follow/favorite if you like it!**



## 2. Chapter 2

She had lost Dustin *again* after they got home funeral, but she let it happen, knowing he would come to her when he needed to or wanted to. He came home late that night and left early the next morning, and she had gotten a call on Saturday, telling her that he was going to be spending the night at the Wheeler's and not to worry. She accepted the obviously bullshit excuse and told him to be safe and call if he needed anything.

She focused her energy on cooking instead of worrying, making a casserole for the Byers. It wasn't much, and they probably had a freezer full of them, but she felt like she needed to do something. Which is how she had ended up at the Byers' on Saturday night. Alone. At the door. With a breakfast casserole and cookies. She heard muffled voices float through the door and she swallowed her nervousness, raising a hand to knock. The voices quieted, and the door cracked open, Jonathan's face peeking through.

"Oh, hey, Maddie." He sounded nervous, and a blood-stained cloth was wrapped around his hand as he held the door open.

"Hey. Is everything okay?" She narrowed her eyes slightly at his skittishness. "You look like hell."

He let out a breathy laugh, turning his head to look at something inside the house. "Yeah, no, I'm good. Great. Not to be rude, but why are you here?"

Maddie shook her head, suddenly remembering her reason for coming. "Oh! I, uh, brought you a casserole. And some cookies. I know it's not much, but I figured your mom wouldn't feel like cooking or anything, and you probably wouldn't have time with school and everything, so- "

He cut her off, reaching an arm out to take the food. "Yeah, it's great, Maddie. Thanks so much, I really appreciate, but you should probably go now." With that, he closed the door, leaving Maddie on the front porch.

She blinked, confused, before taking a step back towards her truck. She fumbled with the keys for a moment before the sound of a car approaching stopped her, lights coming around the corner right as she looked up. The car stopped next to her, the engine cutting off before Steve got out.

His eyes met hers and the surprise was hard to stop from crossing her face. The left side of his face was completely covered in blood, most of it dried. There were several cuts littering his cheekbone and the bridge of his nose, and the skin underneath was yellowing and swollen.

"What the hell happened to you?"

Steve laughed humorlessly. "I was a dick, what else is new?"

Maddie rolled her eyes, crossing her arms as she leaned a hip against the hood of her truck. "Why are you here, anyways? Last I heard, you weren't exactly friends with Jonathan Byers."

Steve scoffed. "What do you care? I barely know you," he said, moving around her to walk to the front door. He rolled up his sleeves before banging on the door, calling for Jonathan. To both Steve and Maddie's surprise, Nancy opened the door instead of Jonathan. Steve's voice became quiet, and he spoke to Nancy before pushing his way in. Rolling her eyes at the action, Maddie made her way to the porch, hoping that she wouldn't have to break up a fight between her friend and the boy that kept showing up.

Her eyes involuntarily widened at the sight of Nancy waving a gun at Steve. "Holy shit, Nancy!"

The other girl turned to her, eyes wide. "Maddie, what the hell are you doing here? You know what? It doesn't matter, you both need to leave *now*!"

"*Nancy!* The lights!" Jonathan yelled, motioning to the flickering lights. Nancy turned, finally hearing him, and immediately went to stand with him.

"Where is it?"

"Where is what?!" Maddie asked, her confusion and panic rising each time the lights flickered, the worried looks on Nancy and Jonathan making her feel even more uneasy.

"What is going on?" Steve asked, his fearful tone echoing Madeleine's confusion.

"I don't see it," Nancy said, ignoring both of them.

Cracks spidering through the ceiling silenced all of them, white dust falling as *something* crawled its way through the gaping hole. Nancy lifted the gun, firing off several rounds at the creature before Jonathan grabbed her, pulling her towards the hallway.

"Go, go!" He grabbed Steve's wrist, Steve grabbing Maddie's arm, as they all ran towards the hall. The lights were flashing rapidly now, and Maddie nearly tripped over herself trying to get to the end of the hall and look at whatever the hell was following them.

"Jump!" Jonathan called, Steve obeying and Maddie following in turn, narrowly missing the metal trap in the middle of the gasoline-soaked carpet.

"Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God," Steve muttered as he flung himself into the room, Maddie close behind as Jonathan slammed the door shut.

"Jesus, what the hell is that! What the hell- "

"Shut up!" Nancy and Jonathan cried in unison, turning to face the door with their weapons at the ready. Maddie looked around frantically, hoping to find something that she could use to defend herself, but stilled as she heard thumping coming down the hallway.

"What's it doing?" Nancy whispered to Jonathan as he shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied before the electricity jolted, a sparking sound echoing through the house as the lights finally stopped flickering. The group ventured out of the room at the silence that now filled the hall. The bear trap remained untouched, and the ceiling in the living room looked as if it hadn't been caved a few minutes ago.

Maddie shifted, chewing on her lip nervously, halfway expecting something to grab her and drag her down the hallway they had just exited. Steve was muttering underneath his breath next to her, gradually getting louder as the reality of what just happened settled in.

"This is crazy, right? I mean, this is crazy. This is crazy!" He lunged for the phone, starting to put in a number before Nancy snatched it from his hand. Maddie stepped into the living room, leaving the two to argue quietly. Jonathan had loosened his grip on the bat slightly, his face still displaying the nervousness that she felt. She caught his attention, waving slightly.

"So, what the hell just happened?"

Jonathan shook his head. "If I knew, I would tell you. Look, Maddie, it's not safe here. You really need to go."

She scoffed, shaking her head. "You think I care? I'm not leaving you and Nancy here. Not alone."

The words had hardly left her mouth before Steve burst out of the door, closing it behind him. Nancy turned to Maddie, her face slightly cold as she set her jaw.

"You too, Maddie. You need to go." Maddie looked at her, mouth slightly open.

"Seriously? That thing is going to come back, I'm not-"

The lights flickered before she finished speaking, and the three teenagers gravitated towards each other, sticking together as they waited for the reappearance of the monster. The lights flashed rapidly, and they circled around each other nervously, waiting for the creature to burst through the ceiling or the wall.

"Does anyone see it?" Maddie asked quietly, her voice shaking slightly.

"I don't know, I don't see anything," Nancy replied, both girls falling silent as the room went dark. A strange rumbling sound came from behind them, and they turned.

"Jonathan!" they cried in unison, but the monster leaped before they got his attention and knocked him to the ground, his bat falling from his hands and rolling to the side. Maddie watched in horror as the monster's face opened up, growling as it hovered above Jonathan. Nancy got a few rounds off, her screams distracting the monster slightly until the gun clicked, signifying its emptiness. Maddie felt behind her as she backed against the wall, her hand wrapping around a porcelain bowl that she flung towards the monster, shattering as it hit the monster's head. The thing opened its mouth, and Maddie squeezed her eyes shut, bracing herself for a bite that never came.

She opened her eyes in confusion as the monster roared again but didn't lunge for her. Steve was standing in front of her, swinging the bat Jonathan dropped wildly, warding off the monster. He landed a few blows, driving the monster back away from Maddie and back towards the hallway they had been chased down. He swung the bat and landed one last hit, causing the creature to stumble right into the bear trap.

Jonathan saw this and grabbed the lighter he had been wielding earlier, tossing it into the puddle of gasoline that soaked the carpet. Flames licked up and the monster screeched in pain, wriggling as it tried to escape the trap. Jonathan pushed them all back, grabbing a fire extinguisher as he doused the fire. Maddie brought a sleeve to cover her face, coughing heavily as clouds covered the room. The fog cleared, leaving the four feeling slightly strangled as they all panted, watching the hallway for movement.

"W-Where did it go?" Nancy asked, her voice thick from coughing.

Maddie shook her head as she leaned against the wall, squinting to try and see through the still-clearing fog.

"No, no it has to be dead," Jonathan said, his voice cracking slightly at the sight of the empty trap, goo bubbling where the monster once stood.

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Maddie sighed, shifting again as she tried to get comfortable in the incredibly *uncomfortable* chair. They had been waiting for at least four hours, hoping to get word of Will's waking soon. She sighed

again and accepted the fact that this was as good as it was going to get and settled into her chair once more. She smiled at the sight of Dustin snoring on top of Lucas, the two boys exhausted from the events of the evening.

The thing had never reappeared after the fire had gone out, and the teenagers had decided to take it as a sign of safety. Johnathan and Nancy had insisted they return to the school, where they had been greeted with the flashing lights of police cars and ambulances. Panic had risen like bile in Maddie's throat, and she hadn't even taken the time to close her truck door before rushing towards the swarm of EMT's and police officers surrounding the group of children. She pushed the hovering adults away, searching frantically for her brother's capped head, crying out in relief when she found him sitting in the back of an ambulance, seemingly unharmed. She pulled him into her arms, squeezing him to her tightly.

He wrapped his arms around her just as tight, and the two siblings remained in an embrace for what felt like hours, only breaking apart at the appearance of some sort of federal agent. He had practically forced Dustin and Maddie to sign non-disclosure agreements after finding out that they had both experienced a "demogorgon", and instructed them not to tell anyone, even their mother.

Of course, Maddie had been furious with Dustin after learning about the danger he put himself in, and he was equally upset after hearing about the fight she went through at the Byers' house, but both siblings relented to let each other off the hook, glad to have survived the incident. She had even volunteered to drive Dustin and Lucas to the hospital to wait for Will, where they had found Joyce and Hopper already waiting, the rest of the group arriving soon after.

She crossed her legs, checking her watch once more as she waited for Jonathan to return from Will's room. She laid her head back against the wall, closing her eyes while she tried to get some much needed rest. She cracked one open as she felt the heat of someone staring at her, her gaze landing on Steve. He looked much better with all the blood cleaned off, and she opened her eyes fully, returning his stare.

"What?" She said softly, not wanting to wake Mr. Wheeler, who was dead asleep next to her.

"We never officially met, you know. And I think you kind of owe me your name," he said resting his chin on his hand as he leaned forward, trying to see her better.

She chuckled lightly, leaning her head forward as well. "Oh yeah? How do you figure?"

He smirked and shrugged, "I mean, I did kind of save your life."

She laughed that time, loudly, and Mr. Wheeler started awake for a moment before returning to his slumber. The teenagers giggled before falling silent again.

"Madeleine. Henderson," she said after a pause, sticking her hand out towards him.

"Steve Harrington," he responded, shaking her hand.

She rolled her eyes, a soft smile on her face. "Nice to meet you, Steve. You can call me Maddie."

**A/N: And here's the second chapter! I know it's not much, just kind of a recap of what the last episode of Season 1 would look like if Maddie was there, but we got some Steve/Maddie interaction. I'm going to try and go outside the show for a few chapters and then move back towards the plot of Season 2. Please review and leave me your feedback and follow/favorite for update notifs! I'll try to have Chapter 3 up as soon as I can, so I'll see you guys next time!**

### 3. Chapter 3

"Girl's 1200, Heat Four, please check in. Girl's 1200, Heat Four."

Maddie finished tying her shoelaces and straightened, making her way to the starting line, huddling with a group of other girls as they listened to the woman in front of them.

"Alright, I've got Berkley at lane one, Denton at lane two, Emerson at lane three, Engelhardt at lane four, Ferguson at lane five, Henderson at lane six, and Hollinger at lane seven. Get into starting positions on the count, go at the pistol shot. Good luck, ladies." The coordinator nodded at them before turning and heading towards the field events.

Maddie hopped slightly, shaking out her legs and arms as she waited for the okay to get in her lane. The calling of her name made her look at the stands, the smiling face of her brother greeting her from the bleachers. He waved and held up a homemade sign with her name on it that had an excessive amount of glitter. Her mother waved from next to him and blew her a kiss. Maddie laughed and waved back, her focus returning to the track in front of her as the call for her heat was made.

She lined up on the starting point, waiting for the signal to get into ready position. She bent over, stretching her legs slightly before bending her knees at the sound of a voice telling her to get ready.

"Set!" Maddie lifted herself slightly, clenching and unclenching her fists as she tensed in anticipation.

The echo of the starting shot startled her before she instinctively took off. She stretched her legs out, trying to get a good stride before falling behind the girl from Kendrick High. She exhaled as her left foot hit the ground, setting the pace for herself as the group fell into a rhythm. They turned the corner, losing the last two girls as they fell behind.

"*Pace yourself, Henderson.*" The voice of her coach reached her from across the field. She slowed by a half-step, the second turn coming up in front of them. She remained in second as the curve knocked out



another one, leaving four girls in the leading pack.

She crossed the white line, signifying the end of the first lap, and the nerves she felt slowly melted away as she settled into a comfortable rhythm, her breathing falling in sync with her steps. She let herself go on autopilot for the next two laps but kicked her pace up at the last lap. The other girls had slowly fallen behind, leaving Maddie and the Kendrick girl to fight each other for first.

They both picked up their pace, but Maddie pulled herself next to her, their steps falling into sync as they rounded the corner together. The girl gained a few steps, her baggy, purple uniform flapping behind her as the wind picked up, making them both slow slightly. Maddie grit her teeth, pumping her legs harder as they came up on the final turn and home stretch. The girl in front had fallen into a more relaxed posture, and her steps slowed ever so slightly as she hit the last 100 meters.

Maddie drew in a deep breath, forcing herself to go faster, go harder, as she gained the lost ground back. The girl heard her, and tried to pick her pace back up, but she couldn't keep up with Maddie's newfound energy, already tired from the quick pace she had used throughout the race. Maddie moved her arms quicker as she used the last bit of energy she had left, pulling herself across the finish line before letting herself slow into a walk.

She put her hands above her head, sucking in deep breaths as the girl from Kendrick followed suit. They shook hands and Maddie headed back to her team, waiting to hear the final results. She pulled a jacket on, the spring air still chilly as she huddled with another girl on her team, trying to block the wind for each other. The announcer broadcasted that the results had been recorded, asking each competitor to listen for their name. He went through the top times from all four heats, working his way up to the final three of the event.

"With a bronze for a time of four minutes and fifty-three seconds, Raine Berkley from Addison High," he said, his voice booming across the stadium as polite applause showered the smiling girl.

"And with the gold, with a time of four minutes and twenty-eight

seconds...." The announcer paused, and Maddie felt herself lean in, holding her breath. "Madeleine Henderson!" A grin broke out on her face as someone handed her a medal, and she felt exhilarated, the girls from her team surrounding her in celebration. Maybe joining track wasn't the worst idea she'd had.

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She waved at Coach Smith as she left, smiling and thanking him when he congratulated her. Maddie's feet left the ground as someone wrapped their arms around her waist and lifted her, spinning her around.

"Alright, Henderson! First place, with the gold medal! Next stop, Olympics, amirite?" She laughed and swatted Steve's arm playfully, turning as he set her down.

"Oh yeah, for sure. I can see it now, Madeleine Henderson, top runner for the USA in the 1984 Summer Olympics," she said, a smile on her face as she punched his arm lightly. "And don't *do that*! You scared me half to death!"

"Congrats, Maddie," Jonathan's voice came from behind her and she tackled him into a hug.

"Thanks, Jon. Hey, Steve, where's Nance?" she asked, looking for the familiar brunette.

"She had to stay home with Holly, but she sends her love," Steve replied, placing his hand over his heart dramatically.

"Maddie!" A cracking voice made its way through the crowd and Maddie turned to see Dustin pushing his way past the swarm of people.

She grinned, waving her brother and mother over. "Hey, squirt. What'd you think?"

Dustin scoffed, "Uhm, I think my big sister is better than any other girl out there! And look at this shit, you got a gold medal," he said, grabbing the award from her neck.

"Dusty, language!" her mother scolded before giving her daughter a

kiss and a hug. "You did great, sweetie. I'm so proud of you!"

"Thanks, Mom." She squeezed her mom tightly before turning to the boys. "Who's hungry? Because I'm starved."

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Maddie sat back contentedly, pushing away her. "Oh my God, I'm never going to be hungry again," she moaned, putting a hand on her stomach. Jonathan rolled his eyes.

"Oh please, when the waitress comes back, you're gonna be asking for a double chocolate malt." She frowned at him, slapping his arm lightly.

"Are you calling me fat, Byers?" The boy chuckled and shook his head as he stirred his soda with a straw. The three teenagers sat in "their" booth at Oma's Diner, empty plates littering the table before them. The youngest Henderson had opted out of going with them, leaving Maddie alone with the two boys. She turned her attention to the unnaturally silent teen across from her.

"Why so quiet, Steve?"

He looked up, jolted from whatever daydream he had been focused on. "Huh? I mean, yes to whatever you asked."

Maddie rolled her eyes. "Daydreaming about Miss Wheeler again, are we?" Steve blushed at her statement, scratching the back of his head and mumbling something to refute her words. An uncomfortable silence settled around the table, broken only by the slurping sound that Maddie made as she finished her drink.

"You know, it's getting late, I should probably head out," Steve said, standing and digging a crumpled ten from his pocket, tossing it onto the table. Maddie squeezed his arm in farewell, and he shot her a small smile.

"See you tomorrow," he said to them, giving a half-hearted salute before walking out the door. Maddie moved to the side of the booth he had been sitting in, facing Jonathan.

"You need to tell her."

Jonathan shook his head, his focus drawn to the drops of condensation rolling down the side of his glass. "I just- I can't," he sighed, shaking his head again. Maddie rolled her eyes, pushing the glass to the side, forcing him to look at her.

"Look, it's been like, two months since the *incident*. And I hate to tell you this, but she's starting to think nothing is gonna happen, and if you're not there and someone-" she motioned to the door that Steve had just left through "-else is, she's gonna move on. You gotta do something, Jon."

He pressed his lips together in a thin line, not saying anything. Maddie sighed, leaning forward to rest her elbows on the table. The atmosphere grew thick with silence, though not quite as uncomfortable as before. The waitress brought the check, and they both put the correct amount on the table before standing. The air outside was chillier than usual, and Maddie's breath came out in clouds.

"C'mon, I'll drive you home," Jonathan said, pointing his thumb back towards his car. Maddie nodded and walked around the passenger side, pulling the door open. They rode to the house in silence, and Maddie thanked him as she moved to get out of the car.

"I'll tell her. Tomorrow. I swear I will," Jonathan said quietly, stopping Maddie from getting out of the car. She let a smile spread across her face and she leaped across the center console, hugging his shoulders as she squealed in excitement.

"Okay! Okay, okay, great!" she said happily, clapping. A small smile crept onto his face at her antics, and he leaned back into his seat.

She smiled once more before getting out of the car, jogging towards her front door. "See you tomorrow, before homeroom!" He lifted a hand to wave at her before driving off.

---

"Dustin, come *on*! You got five minutes before I leave your ass!" Maddie called down the hall, pulling her hair into a ponytail as she waited for her brother to emerge from the bathroom.

"Language, Maddie," her mother warned from the kitchen, placing a lunch kit on the counter for the youngest Henderson. Maddie smiled guiltily at her mom as she took the lunch kit and stood by the front door, Dustin finally dashing down the hall and into the living room, looking around the room wildly, his curls swinging as he turned his head frantically. Maddie held out his favorite baseball cap and lunch kit as her brother finally looked at her, a smile of relief breaking out on his face.

"Bye, Mom! Love you, see you later!" He yelled over his shoulder as he followed Maddie out of the door.

"Let's go, you little shit. You're gonna make me late," Maddie scolded as she ushered her brother into the passenger seat of her truck.

"Hey, don't rush art. Looking this good takes time," Dustin retorted, Maddie rolling her eyes as she closed the door and started the truck.

"I would agree with you, but then we'd both be wrong," Maddie quipped as she reversed out of the driveway. Dustin scowled and punched her shoulder.

"Don't hit the driver!" Maddie said, reaching over to hit Dustin.

"Don't insult the passenger," he responded, sticking out his tongue at her before slouching in his seat.

---

"I'm picking you up at five, don't be late!" Maddie yelled out the window at Dustin's retreating back. He held up a hand in a half-wave to signify that he heard her before running to catch up with Mike and Will. She shook her head before steering her truck out of the parking lot and towards the high school.

She pulled into an open spot, pulling her backpack from the middle seat before closing the door and locking it. Jonathan pulled up next to her and she waited for him to get out before the pair walked towards the front of the school together.

"When are you gonna do it? You're still doing it right?" Maddie questioned excitedly, referring to the conversation they had had last

night. Jonathan smiled at his friend's antics as he adjusted the bag on his shoulder.

"Yes, I'm still doing it. We have English together, but I'm not sure-" He stopped walking, his next words dying in his throat. Maddie furrowed her eyebrows, looking at her friend quizzically before following his gaze. Her heart dropped slightly at the sight of Steve and Nancy kissing in Steve's car. They broke away shortly after, but the damage had already been done. Maddie turned back to face Jonathan, already trying to say something to comfort him. His mouth was slightly agape, and his eyes looked dejected as he continued to watch the two in front of him.

"Jonathan, I'm so so sorry," Maddie began, holding a hand out towards him. Jonathan finally turned towards her, his mouth closing and forming into a sad smile.

"It's okay, Maddie. Really. I should've listened to you. She found someone else, someone better. It's fine," he said, giving her arm a squeeze before pushing past her, his steps quickening as he passed Nancy and Steve. Nancy called out to him, but he ignored her, disappearing behind the glass doors. Steve saw Maddie and waved her over, and she steeled herself as she made her way towards the couple.

"What's wrong with Jonathan? He totally blew me off," Nancy questioned, her wide eyes full of confusion.

"I think he's just not feeling good, is all. Said his head was hurting last night, maybe it's a migraine. Hey, did you know the word 'migraine' was derived from two Latin words meaning 'cranium' and 'half' 'cause you feel the pain across one side.." She trailed off from her babbling, Steve and Nancy looking at her suspiciously. Maddie sighed.

"It's really nothing, guys," she affirmed, inching her way towards the doors. She grabbed Nancy and pulled her along with her.

"Walk me to class," she commanded, turning to wave at Steve. He gave a confused wave back before heading towards his homeroom.

"You need to talk to Jonathan later, okay? Just you. I can't tell you why," Maddie said, already cutting off Nancy's questioning. "You just need to, alright?" Maddie gave her a serious look before breaking off towards pre-cal, leaving a very confused Nancy in the hallway.

Maddie plopped into her desk and sighed, rubbing her temples. All this talk of migraines was starting to give her one.

**A/N: Ta-da! Chapter 3! I know it's kind of slow right now, but I'm trying to kind of build up towards the second season so Maddie isn't a total Mary Sue. I hope you guys continue to enjoy the story, and I'm going to self-promote a bit and tell you that if you like Bucky Barnes/OC fics, I have one published call Short Circuit that is currently in progress! I update that story and this one at different times, so they aren't on the same level yet, but just throwing it out there. Please review letting me know what you think and follow/favorite for updates! Also, I'm going to respond to reviews that I can't PM on the end of my A/N's, so here we go:**

**RedVelvetPanPan: Thank you so much for the positive reviews! I agree, Dustin's one of my favorite kiddos, so I figured, why not make my OC his sister! I hope you continue to enjoy reading the story as much as I enjoy writing it!**

## 4. Chapter 4

Maddie sighed, flipping her self upside down as she dangled from the edge of Nancy's bed, her Theories of Humanities textbook hovering above her eyes as she attempted to study it.

Steve sat on the floor, leaning against the bed in alignment with Maddie, scribbling notes in his physics notebook as his head slightly bopped along to the music playing softly in the background, a record of Jonathan's choice filling the atmosphere. The aforementioned boy was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the room, his government notes scattered around him as he tried to sort through them, attempting to fill out a study guide. Nancy was sitting in the rolling chair at her desk, spinning herself slowly as she flipped through a list of terms for her English class, mouthing the words silently as she read through each one. A high-pitched beeping filled the room, and Maddie pulled herself up, pressing one of the side buttons as she reset the alarm.

"Switch," she declared, swapping her book with Steve's notes, and Jonathan and Nancy trading theirs as well. Steve stood and stretched, moving to flip the record as everyone readjusted their positions.

"These finals are gonna kick my ass, I swear to God," Nancy said, rubbing her eyes tiredly. Maddie rolled her eyes, throwing a pencil at her jokingly.

"You always say that, right before you ace all of them," Maddie said, stretching herself out as she laid on her stomach, positioning the notes in front of her. Jonathan laughed and nodded at Maddie's statement.

"She's not wrong," he said, motioning towards Maddie as Nancy stuck her tongue out at them.

"I don't like either of you," she said quietly, fake pouting. Steve smiled at her, moving over to the chair she was in.

"What about me?" he asked teasingly, moving in closer as he leaned on the chair.



Nancy shrugged. "Eh, you're alright," she responded, smirking at him. Steve leaned in closer, pressing his lips to hers.

Maddie and Jonathan looked away uncomfortably, and she noticed a certain air of storminess settle over Jonathan, his mood shifting almost immediately. Maddie looked back over at the couple, clearing her throat to remind them of their company. Nancy pushed Steve lightly and he broke away laughing before coming to sit by Maddie again.

"You two are adorable, really. It's sickening," she muttered, readying her watch. Steve punched her leg lightly, and Maddie grinned at him, her tongue between her teeth before pressing the button on her watch.

"And.... Go."

---

Eight o'clock found the group in the same positions, empty pizza boxes and half-drunk sodas littering the space around them. Maddie groaned and sat up, crumpling up the essay she had been working on, her frustration seeping out. Steve sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, his paper falling into the pile that he and Maddie had created over the past hour.

"I'm telling you, Lappison's test is going to kill us. I've never heard of anyone getting higher than a 58 in there, and no one passes the essay questions with full points," Steve muttered ripping out a new sheet of paper and handing it to Maddie as they began to rewrite their essays.

"Well, we are just going to have to be the first," she responded, pulling the physics textbook closer to her and highlighting a passage in green before flipping a few pages.

The room fell silent, the scratching of pencils and flipping of pages being the only noise remaining. Jonathan and Nancy had retreated downstairs to get more food and drink, leaving Maddie and Steve to suffer through their physics review alone.

Jonathan ended up never telling Nancy his true feelings, but Maddie thought that it was obvious, and she often wondered how the other

girl missed it. The puppy dog eyes, the discomfort he displayed when her and Steve were together, the way he brightened around her; *painfully* obvious. But, for once in her life, Maddie kept her opinion to herself, letting the feelings of her friend be left unsaid. Anyways, Steve and Nancy were happy, and she hardly wanted to be the reason of any problems they might have.

"I think I'm going to tell her I love her," Steve said quietly, breaking the peaceful atmosphere.

Maddie froze, her eyes widening slightly at the revelation Steve had just given her. She turned towards him, her shocked eyes meeting his hopeful ones. She sat up and turned towards her best friend, and he mirrored her actions. She blew out a breath, running a hand through her dark waves.

"I mean, are you- is she- are you guys ready for that?" Maddie asked, stumbling over her wording in her surprise.

Steve shrugged slightly and stretched his legs out in front of him.

"I know I'm ready for it. We've been dating for a few months now, and I just know, y'know? Like I know I'm up for the next step. She's the real deal, Mads. I'm serious," he answered, keeping eye contact with Maddie. His eyes quickly widened as his face fell. "Is it too soon? Do you think I'm moving too fast?"

"I mean," Maddie began, licking her lips as she contemplated what to say next. "It's not a matter of how long you've been dating, it's about how you feel, and what you feel in your heart." She paused. "When you see her, what do you feel?"

Steve thought for a moment, his hands combing through his hair. "It's like... Like when I hit the last shot during Regionals, but better. Way better. When I see her, the crowd goes wild, but instead of the crowd, it's me, y'know?" He groaned, resting his forehead in his hand. "That was way too freakin' corny."

Maddie grinned, patting Steve's shoulder lightly. He caught her hand in his, holding it in place as he lamented his wording.

"I think it will be just fine. Listen, I gotta take Dustin home, so I'll see you tomorrow," she said, using him as a crutch to stand.

He held a hand up and she pulled him up, despite the fact that she was a solid five inches shorter than he was. She held her arms open and Steve rolled his eyes.

"Hey! You may love Nancy, but I'm still the best friend here," she pouted, sticking out her lip slightly.

Steve laughed at his friend, relenting and giving her a hug. "Don't worry, Mads. You're still my best girl," he responded before she pulled away.

"Damn straight," she said, a teasing smile on her face as she slung her backpack over her shoulder. "See you tomorrow!"

She paused by the door. "Hey, Steve?"

He looked up at her. "Yeah?"

"It wasn't too corny," she said before slipping down the stairs.

Steve smirked, putting his hands on his hips as he watched her leave. Now if he could actually work up the courage to tell Nancy.

Maddie walked down the basement stairs halfway, calling for Dustin. "C'mon, Dustin. We gotta head out."

Dustin groaned, and the other boys looked at him sympathetically. "Ten more minutes?" he asked, turning to face Maddie. Seeing her hesitation, he held up his hands, displaying all ten fingers. "Please? Just ten. Then I'll go, I swear!"

Maddie sighed, shaking her head. "Ten minutes. Finish the campaign soon, Mike," she called as she made her way back up the stairs. Dustin turned back towards them enthusiastically and Mike continued his narrative.

She walked into the kitchen, coughing as she inhaled a mouthful of flour. "Holy shit, what the hell did you guys do?" she asked, her eyes widening at the state of the kitchen.

Jonathan and Nancy looked at her guiltily, both of them covered in various ingredients as a cookbook laid open on the counter, an empty bowl next to it. Nancy started giggling, followed by a small chuckle from Jonathan, and soon both teens were cackling, Nancy leaning with one arm on the counter and one on Jonathan's shoulder. Maddie stood in confusion at the entryway, heavy footsteps sounding on the stair behind her followed by Steve appearing next to her, his arm brushing hers.

"I thought you were making cookies," he asked, a small smile on his face as he observed the two.

They finally calmed, their laughs dying out before Nancy reached her hand in the sack of flour next to her, a smirk on her face as she flicked it onto Steve's face. She started laughing again and Steve wiped his face before lunging at his girlfriend, both of them laughing as he threw a handful in her now-white hair. Jonathan turned towards Maddie, smirking as he took a step towards her. Maddie turned at his movement, her smile from Steve and Nancy's interaction dying at the sight of her filthy friend making his way to her, his arms open.

"Jonathan, I swear to God, if you touch me, I will never speak to you again," she declared backing away and pointing a finger at him.

Steve heard her speaking and mimicked Jonathan, walking towards Maddie as both flour-covered boys reached out for her. "C'mon, Mads, you don't want a hug?"

Maddie dropped her backpack as she put her foot out the door of the kitchen. "Steven Joseph Harrington, if you make one move-"

Her threat came up empty as Steve grabbed her, and Maddie was sandwiched between him and Jonathan. She gasped at the contact, trying to wriggle away, but it was too late. The flour had already transferred onto her clothes, and the two boys squeezed her harder. Steve rested his cheek on top of Maddie's head, wiping the baking powder from his face onto her scalp.

"I hate you both," she grumbled, finally pulling away from them and swiping at her face to rid it of any powder.

"No, you don't," Steve said proudly, walking back towards Nancy. Maddie shook her head, re-shouldering her backpack before calling down the basement stairs again.

Dustin came up shortly after, his eyes widening at his mess of a sister. "What the hell happened to you?"

The question had the older boys howling with laughter, Steve slapping his leg as Jonathan leaned against the counter. Maddie scowled at them before walking out the front door, Dustin following behind her.

"No, really, what is all over you?"

---

The ticking of the clock distracted her, and she unconsciously tapped her pencil in rhythm with it, chewing her lip as she tried to recall the answer to the question in front of her. Steve was bouncing his leg; she could tell because it was shaking her entire desk, and Maddie kicked her foot backwards, hitting his shin.

"Ow," he hissed, and Maddie rolled her eyes.

"Mr. Harrington, is there something you want to share with the class?" Mr. Lappison asked from the desk he was sitting at, his face stern.

Steve shook his head, "No, sir."

Maddie smirked in satisfaction as the bouncing stopped, but the smirk slipped from her face as Steve kicked her desk, making her pencil jerk, drawing a line across the question she was currently trying to answer. She gasped, and even with her back turned, she could tell Steve was laughing.

The little punk.

---

"Thanks for getting me in trouble," Steve said as he came out of the classroom.

Maddie looked up from the floor, scoffing as she took a step towards

Steve, leaving the wall she had previously been leaning on.

"Thanks for making me mess up my test," she retorted, shoving him lightly with her shoulder. Steve gave her a devilish grin, and the two rounded the corner.

"Only one more final until we're seniors!" Maddie exclaimed in excitement, bouncing on her toes as they exited the school, making their way towards the parking lot.

Steve nodded, twirling his keys. "Isn't it weird? We're about to be adults," he commented as they stopped at his car.

"You get to be an adult, I still have to wait a little," Maddie corrected, settling into the passenger seat. "You know I'm gonna be seventeen when we graduate? I'm not gonna get to be eighteen till the middle of our first semester!"

Steve chuckled as he started the car. "It's not that bad, Mads. At least you're graduating ahead of time," he pointed out.

Maddie rolled down her window, letting the warm air in. "Yeah, I guess."

The two continued the conversation about their upcoming senior year, even as Steve's car ambled into Maddie's driveway. He shut the car off, leaning back into his seat.

"So, did you tell her?" Steve looked over, slightly confused at the question before understanding what she meant.

"No, not yet anyways. I'm thinking tomorrow; I'm taking her to the movies to see that new Indiana Jones movie," he said, running his fingers through his hair repeatedly, puffing it up even more.

Maddie smiled at him, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively. "Like in the movies, when your hands reach for the popcorn at the same time, and her fingers brush against yours *just so*-" She began laughing as Steve shoved her playfully, smothering a smile of his own.

"Shut *up*, Maddie," he said, his bashful face turning back towards the dash.

She gasped, placing a hand over her heart. "You wound me, Steve," she said dramatically, flopping on top of me, feigning death. Steve just shook his head as he laughed at Maddie's antics. She grinned back before sitting up, pulling her bag from the floor of the car.

"Thanks for the lift, friend. See you tomorrow, study well," she said, saluting him jokingly. Steve returned the salute, waiting until Maddie was inside the house safely before pulling out of the drive.

His best friend was something else, of that he was certain.

**A/N: And Chapter 4 lives! Thank y'all for being patient with me, and for giving this story much more attention than I thought it would receive. I know it's still slice-of-life kind of writing, but I want the pace of the story to build, rather than jumping from Season 1 to Season 2, but let me know if y'all want me to go ahead and roll with it! Onto guest reviews!**

**RedVelvetPanPan:** I appreciate your enthusiasm and your incredibly kind comments! I'm still in the process of figuring that out myself, so it will have to remain a mystery for now I love that you're passionate about fanfiction, and I hope to continue seeing your positivity on my story!

**Mcduffie145:** I'm in love with this pairing too, so I'm glad you are too! I was hoping the self-promoting would work I wanted someone to catch it, so I'm happy you did! I figured Elle would be too obvious, so I had to mix it up in a little while.

## 5. Chapter 5

**PSA: Read the A/N below!**

"Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch!" Dustin's voice floated through the halls of the Henderson home, and Maddie rolled her eyes, removing her headphones. Her little brother was loud enough for her to hear him over the music anyways.

She heard his footsteps thump past her door and into the living room. She stood, stretching, before making her way into hallway, listening to her brother continue his tirade.

"Another stupid penny!" He said, throwing it across the room. Maddie crossed her arms, watching from the doorway in amusement.

"Dusty, watch it! You almost hit Mews," her mother said, the cat in question purring on her lap. Maddie was fairly certain her mother loved her cat more than her.

"Can I *please* check under your cushions?" Dustin asked, ignoring the previous comment.

"Dusty," her mother whined.

"Please! It's an emergency!"

Her mother made a groaning noise and Dustin mimicked her, making Maddie roll her eyes for the second time that night. She was living in a house with two children. Dustin rifled through the gaps of the chair, his eyes gleaming when he pulled out his haul: two quarters.

"If you need more, I have some in my truck," Maddie said finally, trying to keep a smile off of her face at the excitement her brother showed.

"Are you serious? Oh my God, thank you, Maddie! You're the best sister ever, I love you to the moon and back! Seriously!" Dustin said, wrapping his arms around his sister's waist.

"Yeah, I know, you little runt. You need a ride?" she replied,



following her brother back down the hallway towards their bedrooms. Dustin shook his head emphatically, before thanking her again and disappearing behind his door.

Maddie returned to her room, slipping her headphones back on and closing her eyes. A tapping sound broke her from almost dozing off, and she pulled the headphones back off, eyes opening as she already knew what the sound meant. She turned towards her window, opening the curtains to reveal Steve standing outside, a sheepish grin on his face. Rolling her eyes (three times in 15 minutes must be some kind of world record), she opened the window, leaning against it as she addressed the boy.

"What do you want?"

"Love and affection?"

Maddie snorted. "You're not getting either of those from me, so you might as well head on home."

"Look, Mads," Steve began, sitting on the sill across from her. "I know I screwed up, but can you please forgive me?" He gave his best impression of puppy dog eyes. "I'll be your best friend if you do!" He said in a sing song tone.

"It's not a joke, Steve. I want to forgive you, I do, but I just-" She paused for a moment, looking away. "I just can't," she finished quietly.

"I know, and I realize that what I did hurt you, but you have to know that I had no idea," Steve said, his demeanor growing much more serious.

"I think you should go," she said softly, her eyes focused on her hands folded in her lap. Steve stared at her for a moment, his eyes wide.

"You don't mean that," he said, trying to get a look at her face. "Mads, come on, you don't mean that."

"No, I think I do," she said, her tone much colder than a moment ago. She looked at him, her jaw set. "You need to go now."

Steve looked at her, trying to decide what to do before standing and brushing the back of his jeans off. He ran a hand through his hair as he turned to leave but turned back to Maddie.

"You're still my best girl, Mads," he said, putting a hand in his pocket as he leaned back on his heels, looking at her. Maddie watched him go before closing the window and drawing the curtains again.

Boys suck.

---

## *2 Weeks Earlier*

"I *hate* Mrs. Robinson's class. Who the hell assigns a ten-page paper on a three-day weekend," Maddie groaned, making her unhappiness known to the boy next to her.

Steve laughed, slinging his arm around her shoulders. Maddie pouted up at him as the two made their way down the crowded halls of Hawkins High, stopping in front of Steve's locker, which had a large paper basketball with his name and number plastered on the front. He switched books and popped a piece of gum in his mouth before offering one to Maddie. She took one and unwrapped it as she waited for her friend to finish.

"It's not that big of a deal, Mads. You'll probably finish it in no time, anyways. I mean, you're smart as hell, especially when it comes to history," Steve responded, closing his locker before moving to walk next to Maddie.

"But *ten. Pages.* Ten, Steve! She hates us, I swear," Maddie replied, trailing off slightly as Steve made a beeline for Nancy, leaving her behind.

Maddie's mouth curved downwards as she watched the couple interact, Jonathan making his way around them and coming to a stop next to her. He gave a slight wave before opening his locker. Maddie sent him a small smile before leaning against the lockers next to him.

"How's life, Jon?" she asked, a small smile quirking at the edge of his lips.

"Life goes on," he said melodramatically, shaking his head and sighing in fake tragedy. She chuckled at him before turning away.

"And how's your life, Maddie?" Jonathan asked, his steps falling in line with hers.

"Could be better, could be worse," she said, turning the corner.

"Ah, so same as usual then," he replied, fidgeting with the camera around his neck.

Maddie simply gave him a smirk before entering her classroom, taking a seat in the back as the bell rang. Coach Jackson nodded at her as she sat down, and she smiled at him. The girl's basketball coach was one of the nicest members of staff at the school, and took a job as the guidance counselor. She had signed up for a few appointments with him, hoping that he would help her figure out what the hell she was going to do with her life after high school. The meetings had returned very little fruit. A crumbled up piece of paper hit her in the head and she turned towards the source, dark waves whipping her face lightly at the sudden movement. Steve pointed at the paper ball that was now on the floor, mouthing something to her. Maddie rolled her eyes and picked it up.

*I know sumthing that can take ur mind off hw this wknd.*

Passing notes in class? She looked at Steve and he gave her a thumbs up, and she shook her head, laughing silently.

*R we in 3rd grade? And what is it?*

She tossed the paper back to him, and he quickly scribbled a response down before returning it to her.

*Party. Matthew Espinoza's. 8. Tmrw.*

She looked back at Steve, her eyes widening. He gave a grin and nodded.

"No," she mouthed, shaking her head. Steve just nodded again.

*Do u want me kicked off team?*

She threw it back a little harder than necessary, crossing her arms as she waited for him to reply.

: (

She rolled her eyes, tossing the paper into the wastebasket behind her. Another piece of paper soon sailed towards her.

*Be my DD?*

---

*Present*

The front door slammed, shaking her walls slightly. Maddie removed her headphones, blearily looking at the clock. Dustin's bedroom door slammed, and she cringed at the loud noise, waiting a few moments before getting out of bed. She yawned, stretching, and walked out her room, standing in front of Dustin's door as she waited for her little brother to reappear. When she didn't hear any movement, she knocked on the door lightly, waiting for the okay to come in before opening it.

"You good, little bro?" She questioned, sitting on the edge of his bed as her brother's face remained buried in a pillow.

He looked up at her, his face red in anger or embarrassment or both.

"My high score on *Dig Dug* got beaten by some new kid called MadMax. Who calls themselves that? And I spent all my quarters trying to beat it, so now I have no high score and no money. Life sucks," Dustin ranted, flopping back down into the pillow.

"Can't argue with you on that one," Maddie agreed, laying down next to him.

"Will had another episode," Dustin said softly, after some time of silence.

Maddie stayed quiet.

"Do you think he'll ever be *fully* back? He says he's okay, but he's not the same," Dustin said, his voice barely above a whisper.

"It's hard to go through what he did and be fully okay, Dusty. Give him time, space, and support. That's all you can do. But he needs his friends right now, so be that for him, okay?" Maddie responded.

Dustin sat quietly, thinking over what Maddie had said. "You're right. Thanks, Maddie."

"Love you, you little twerp."

"Love you too, old woman."

---

*2 weeks earlier*

"I dunno, Steve. Are you sure this is a good idea?"

"All of my ideas are good!"

"That's bullshit."

"... Yeah, you're right."

Maddie shook her head as they pulled into a spot on the side of the street. The house across from them already had people spilling out of it, red cups in their hands as they stumbled across the lawn or smoked on the porch.

"C'mon, Mads! Live a little!" Steve said, throwing an arm around her shoulders as they walked towards the house.

"Why couldn't Nancy be your driver? I have a paper due Monday," Maddie whined, stepping through the door as Steve held it open for her.

"I dunno, something about homework and having to watch Holly for her parents, I think," Steve said, waving his hand around.

He saw a boy on his team and waved, pulling Maddie across the room with him. The boys started talking about the Pacers' terrible season, leaving Maddie feeling terribly awkward on the side. She spotted a blonde girl across the room and waved her over. Blaire pulled Maddie in for a bear hug, and she could smell the alcohol

radiating off of the other girl.

"Jesus, Blaire, how much have you had?" Maddie asked, wrinkling her nose slightly.

The taller girl giggled, swaying slightly as she place a hand on the counter behind them. "Only a cup! Or two. This may be my third," she said sheepishly, sipping from the cup again.

"Coach Smith would be pissed as hell if he saw you right now," Maddie said, biting back a grin.

Blaire rolled her eyes, tossing her long hair over her shoulder. "You worry too much, Maddie! Let loose! Have fun!" The other girl whooped giddily before dancing her way into the crowded living room.

Maddie laughed at her before moving into the kitchen. She grabbed a small plate and filled it with chips and grabbed a Sprite from an overflowing ice chest before making her way into the living room. She dodged a few drunken couples dancing wildly before finding a spot by the stairs to sit. The hallway was much less crowded, save a few of the football players making their way out of the door to share cigarettes. Maddie sighed, balancing the plate on her knees as she opened her drink, her eyes scanning over the party as she looked for Steve. She didn't see him anywhere, even when she scanned over everyone's heads to try to find his hair.

She had been officially ditched.

---

### *Present*

"Dustin! You got 2 minutes before you have to ride your bike to school, *again!* Get a move on!" Maddie yelled down the hall, hoping he would hear her from the kitchen.

She shoved the peanut butter sandwiches into two plastic bags, tossing one into Dustin's lunch kit and the other into a brown paper sack. Randomly choosing two bags of chips, she did the same with those, and finished off the lunches with two oranges and a Sprite in

one. She poured the coffee from the stove into a thermos, placing it on the counter as she closed the lunch kit.

"Maddie, honey, have you seen my-" Claudia Henderson cut herself off as Maddie held out a key ring.

She took it and kissed Maddie's cheek, grabbing the brown sack and thermos from the counter as she called towards Dustin's room, "Bye, sweetheart, have a good day!"

Maddie waved at her as she left, Dustin bolting down the hallway a few moments later.

"Shit, shit, shit," he swore as he tripped over himself trying to pull on his left sneaker, his jacket halfway on.

Maddie stifled a laugh as her brother stumbled the rest of the way out the door, only returning when he realized that Maddie was still inside.

"You're evil," he said, narrowing his eyes as he pointed at his sister.

Maddie held up her hands in surrender. "I never actually told you I was in the truck already," she pointed out, giving him the lunch kit.

Dustin shrugged as he followed Maddie out the door. "Touché."

---

Maddie groaned in frustration, setting her head against her locker as she failed to unlock it *again*. A hand reached around her, pushing her aside and unlocking it for her. She smiled at Jonathan tiredly.

"Thanks, Jon," she said, opening the locker and pulling a binder from it.

He nodded in response as they walked towards Journalism, chatting about current events, jumping from topic to topic. They passed Nancy, and Jonathan waved as Maddie offered a small smile. The other girl smiled back at them, and Steve came up next to her grinning. Maddie's smile dropped from her face and she continued on without Jonathan, who stopped to talk to the pair. She dropped into a seat, pulling some photos from the manila folder in her backpack.

"What was that about?" Jonathan questioned, pulling a chair up next to her.

"Don't want to talk about it," Maddie responded, keeping her eyes on the page in front of her.

Jonathan just remained silent, accepting the statement as he helped Maddie arrange the photos on the paper. Maddie sighed internally as they worked.

She didn't know if she would ever want to talk about it.

**A/N: SO! I've had a lot of thoughts these past few days and I know I only asked about the rewrite yesterday, but I wrote a lot of throwaway one shots, and inspiration struck, so I will NOT be rewriting this story. I love all of y'all, and I'm so, so grateful for the support you showed me when I was saying that I didn't like my writing. You are all amazing, and I hope this chapter gets you excited for the next one! Thank you again for the kind words of encouragement, and making me feel like my writing means something to people. I love all of y'all! And if you reviewed on my author's note, check your inbox for my neverending gratitude ;) (And no, Steve ditching her is not what Maddie is mad about. You'll have to wait for the next chapter for that one ;)**



## 6. Chapter 6

**A/N: There is a portion of this chapter that I have put a trigger warning on, so please be on the lookout for that when you are reading.**

"Boo!"

Maddie started, hunching her shoulders as she braced herself against the weight of someone jumping on top of her. She turned to see Blaire laughing at her and knocked the other girl's arm with hers.

"Don't do that! You scared the living fire out of me," Maddie said, grinning at the leggy blonde.

"It's Halloween week! You *should* be scared," Blaire replied, sending a mischievous smirk at her friend.

Maddie rolled her eyes, her hands reaching up to twist the lock in front of her. Blaire continued talking as Maddie attempted to open her locker, trying and failing after three attempts. The other girl was chatting incessantly about some big party tomorrow night at Tina's house, and how they just *had* to show up, and would Maddie want to do coordinating costumes?

"Son of a bitch!" Maddie cried softly, hitting her fist lightly against the metal door as she failed to unlock it again.

A larger hand reached over Maddie's shoulder, opening the lock with a few flicks of the wrist. Sighing with relief, Maddie turned to face her savior.

"Thank y-" she cut herself off at the sight of a smirking Steve in front of her.

She scowled at him, crossing her arms across her chest. "What do you want?"

Blaire had finally stopped her endless flow of words, the tension between the two evident. She took a step back, allowing Steve and Maddie some semblance of privacy.

"C'mon, Mads. You've given me the cold shoulder for weeks now, don't you think I've had enough?" Steve asked, his eyes pleading with the brunette in front of him.

Maddie scoffed slightly, her eyes widening. "Is that what you think this is? Some sort of penance I'm making you pay? No. No, no, no, no. This is just me making sure you don't get me hurt again," she responded, her voice and face warm with fury.

Steve's eyes darted to either side of them, noticing the small crowd gathering around them. He grabbed Maddie's wrist and pulled her into an empty classroom, shutting the door behind them. She yanked her wrist from his grasp, indignant at his touch. Steve ran a hand through his hair, making it stick up even more than it had been previously.

"I just- Will you- I don't understand!" he finally said, waving his arms as if to demonstrate his helplessness in the situation.

"You don't understand? You don't-" Maddie stopped herself, her throat feeling much tighter than it had a second ago.

She looked away, turning her focus to a crack spidering across the ceiling. Steve stayed silent, not sure if his comfort would be welcomed. Maddie swallowed hard, the sound getting stuck in the thick tension filling the room. She shook her head, taking a step towards the door.

"No, you know what? I think- I think I'm just done," she said quietly, crossing her arms across her chest.

"Done with what?" Steve questioned, taking a step towards her as she moved back again.

Maddie shook her head again, biting her lip as tears threatened to flood her eyes.

"You, Steve! I needed you and you weren't there for me! I trusted you, and you just left me there!" she exploded, her voice rising with each word.

"Maddie, what are you talking about? It was just a stupid party! I

know I was a dick, but I don't understand how that deserves total exile," Steve said, confusion evident on his face.

"I just- I can't," she said, turning to open the door as Steve started to reach towards her.

"Mads-

"Don't touch me!" she cried, yanking her arm away as she looked at him with a mixture of fear and disgust. "Just- don't."

She stepped out into the hallway, allowing herself to be swept into the flow of people walking past.

---

## *2 Weeks Ago*

Maddie rolled her eyes, draining the last of her soda from the plastic cup in her hand as the baseball team celebrated the emptying of the twelfth keg that night by screaming and stampeding through the house. She tried to squeeze through the mob that passed her as she made her way back towards the kitchen to refill her plate with chips. She had just placed the first handful of Doritos when she was suddenly being shaken from behind, her chips falling back into the bowl she had grabbed them from.

"Mads, Mads, Mads!" Steve slurred, *very* drunk as he hugged her from behind. "Have I ever told you how much I love youuu?"

"Not nearly enough as you should, Steven," Maddie replied, smirking at her utterly wasted best friend.

"Harrington! Don't tell me your sorry ass already drank all the Budweiser!" a loud voice thundered across the din of the party, its owner following soon after.

"Don't worry, Kev! I saved a bottle for you," Steve said, grinning as he greeted his friend.

"Mads, this is Kevin McHartney. He plays center on the team," he said, turning to introduce the two.

"Hi, I'm Madeleine, but you can call me Maddie," she said, a polite smile gracing her face as she shook the other boy's hand.

"Kevin," he said, dimples showing as he smiled back. "Also, I think you were needed outside for the championship, Steve."

"Make way, assholes! King Steve is here to defend his crown!" Steve cried, pushing past the two as he made his way towards the porch where the beer pong competition was going on.

"I thought he was 'keg king'?" Maddie said in confusion, not really asking anyone in particular.

"Both actually; Steve liked to party hard before Nancy came along to calm him down," Kevin replied, leaning against the counter as he ran a hand through the blonde hair that brushed his shoulders.

Maddie laughed, mirroring his movement. "Yeah, I heard the legends."

Kevin smiled at her, the two standing in comfortable silence for a moment as the party continued around them.

"Oh, forgive my manners, I should have offered to grab you a drink. What'll you have?" Kevin asked suddenly, apologetically placing a hand on his chest.

"Oh! Um, just Sprite for me, thanks," she said, smiling at the taller boy before he disappeared into the kitchen behind her.

Maybe Steve dragging her to this party wasn't such a bad idea after all.

---

*Present*

---

"Hey, is everything okay? I heard things got intense between you and Steve earlier," Nancy said, concern making her eyebrows furrow as she leaned towards Maddie.

Maddie kept her face blank, shrugging her shoulders in an effort to

seem nonchalant. "Yeah, no big deal. We're fine. I'm *fine*," she said, Nancy's expression remaining unconvinced.

"Sure seemed like it when you two were arguing in Coach Smith's room," Jonathan pitched in, joining the two as they walked down the stairs.

She rolled her eyes. "It's really not that big a deal. We got in an argument, so what? We always argue."

The other teenagers stayed silent, exchanging knowing looks as they made their way out to the parking lot. Exchanging farewells, Maddie got in her truck, starting it and turning down the road towards Hawkins Middle to pick up Dustin.

---

Maddie shifted her weight, readjusting her position as she sat on the counter, *Pride and Prejudice* open in her hands as she blew a bubble with the pink gum she was chewing. Laughter drifted towards her from the stockroom as Bob and Joyce stumbled out, both of their cheeks tinged slightly pink. Joyce cleared her throat and ran a hand through her hair in an attempt to tame it.

"Okay sweetheart, see you tonight," Bob said, kissing Joyce on the cheek as he left the store.

"Bye, Bob," Maddie called after him, a smirk on her face as she looked at Joyce knowingly.

Joyce looked innocently at the younger girl. "What?"

"You two aren't very stealthy, y'know," Maddie replied, the smirk growing into a grin as Joyce blushed furiously. "I'm just giving you a hard time, Joyce. I'm happy for you, really," she continued as she hopped down from the counter.

"Well, I'm glad you're happy. Now I just have to find a way to make Jon and Will happy too," Joyce said, her tone saddening a bit.

Maddie hugged the older woman. "Don't worry about those knuckleheads, they'll smarten up. Just give 'em some time. In the meantime, would you mind if I clocked out a few minutes early on

you? I have an interview at Oma's."

"You're leaving me?" Joyce questioned, her tone mournful as she dramatically reached towards Maddie. "But if you work at Oma's, what will I do here without you?"

She laughed. "Hopefully get better pay! I'll see you later, Joyce."

---

*2 Weeks Ago*

"A Sprite for the lady," Kevin said dramatically, placing a cup in Maddie's hand as he returned from the crowded kitchen.

"Why thank you, kind sir," Maddie replied, smiling at him as he raised his glass.

"A toast! To new friends," he said, giving her a charming smile as they tapped their cups together.

"And old ones," she said, nodding towards Steve drunkenly dancing on the porch as she laughed.

Kevin shook his head, grinning at the antics of their friend. They stood silently for a moment as they sipped their drinks, the music far too loud to talk much anyways. He turned towards Maddie, leaning in so she could hear him clearly.

"It's way quieter upstairs if you want to go talk," he said, his voice raising slightly as the volume of the room increased.

"You mean you don't like getting your eardrums blown out by *The Police*?" Maddie asked back, placing a hand over her chest like she was shocked.

Kevin rolled his eyes at her good-naturedly before Maddie laughed, agreeing. She held her drink slightly above her to avoid spilling it as she made her way towards the stairs. Finally making it to the small hallway, she waited for Kevin to catch up with her before starting the trek up. They passed a couple making out on the landing, causing them to look at each other knowingly before continuing.

There were several rooms upstairs, each with the door closed. A crowd of three waited outside the bathroom door, the sounds of someone vomiting causing them to wince. Kevin knocked lightly against the first door on the right, opening it when he got no response. The lights were off, but when they were switched on they revealed navy blue walls with a large bed in the middle of the wall on the right.

A gray comforter blanketed the bed, which was underneath several shelves with various books and awards shoved on top of them. Two small doors hid a closet, the clothes revealing that the owner of this room was a boy; most likely Matthew Espinoza. After taking in the contents of the rather large room, Maddie sat on the bed, Kevin following suit after shutting the door.

"So, Maddie. What's your story?"

---

**Trigger Warning: This scene contains references to sexual abuse and the use of drugs. Please do not read this if this is a sensitive subject. If you will be able to read, please continue.**

Maddie laughed loudly, placing a hand lightly on Kevin's knee.

"You did NOT!"

"No, I swear to God, I did! You can ask Steve, he'll tell you the whole story!"

Maddie shook her head in disbelief. "I've wondered for *years* who filled Principal Rather's car with bouncy balls! Do you remember how mad he was?"

Kevin straightened up, pursing his lips as he imitated the principal. "Anyone who has information on this *vandalism*, come speak with me immediately!"

She shook her head, her laughter winding down a bit as she caught her breath. She looked over at the clock by the bed, shocked at the time it showed.

"Holy shit, is that what time it is? I've gotta start rounding up Steve,

he takes forever to get in a car when he's sober, let alone when he's wasted," Maddie said, starting to stand but faltering when her head began spinning.

"Whoa there, you okay?" Kevin asked, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"No, yeah, I'm good, just stood up too fast, I think," Maddie responded, stumbling a bit.

"Here why don't you lay down for a second," he said, helping her back onto the bed.

His face began to blur, and his words sounded like they were coming in slow motion. He hovered over her for a moment, adjusting her as she tried to focus. He disappeared for a moment, and she heard a small *click* sound before he came back into her line of sight.

"Wha's happenin'," she slurred, putting a hand on her head as it started to pound.

He pulled her hand away, placing her suddenly heavy arms by her sides. "I would imagine that whatever you drank is starting to get to you, huh?"

Maddie tried to shake her head. "No, I only ha' a Sprite," she said, her tongue starting to feel like lead.

Kevin chuckled, but it didn't sound as nice to her as it did a few minutes ago. "No, Maddie, I think you had a little too much to drink." His hand ran down her arm. "You should really be careful about that; these parties can be dangerous."

She tried to pull away but black was starting to dance on the edges of her vision.

"Shh. Just try to relax," he said, his lips brushing her cheek as he whispered.

Maddie whimpered, a tear falling as she felt him kiss his way across her face.



"Help," she cried, her voice fading from her own ears. "Steve!"

"Ain't nobody able to hear you, sweetheart. You may as well stop resisting," he said, his voice much harsher from the sugary tone he had used earlier.

She closed her eyes, willing the tears to stop falling as his burly hands brushed the buttons of her shirt. "Steve!" She said again, hoping the volume of her voice had risen.

She tried to lift her hands to push him off, but the boy on top of her was much larger than she was, and his arms pinned hers to the mattress. The cold air hit her bare skin, shocking her slightly as hot tears continued down her cheeks.

"Help!" she tried one more time, praying that someone would hear her as a hand smothered her mouth.

**End trigger warning for references to sexual abuse and drugs.**

A loud pounding on the door startled both of them, and he froze as he stared at the door. "Hey! Cops are coming! Everybody out!"

He rolled off the bed, rebuttoning his shirt and unlocking the door to see what was happening. The music had stopped, and everyone was flooding out the front. He ran a hand through his hair, turning back to look in the room before shutting the door behind him. The slamming of the door mixed with approaching sirens were the last thing she heard before her vision completely faded.

**A/N: I know that was intense, which is why I put the trigger warning. I am also considering changing the rating from T to M. If anybody has an issue with what I wrote, please come private message me about it. I really tried very hard to write this without it being too much or being too graphic. That's why this chapter took a little longer than others. I'm not just trying to write this as a shock value or anything of that nature, I'm wanting to paint Maddie as a survivor, and this will come into play later on. Again, if anybody feels that I did not write this in good form or correctly, or if you just have an issue with it, please come to me and let me know so I can adjust accordingly.**

**I love you guys, and I just want to let you know that I'm here if anyone needs to talk or just wants writing advice! On a lighter note, guest reviews:**

**Guest: Billy may make an appearance later on, but you will just have to wait and see!**

**Please leave a review below telling me what you think and follow/favorite for notifs when I update!**

## 7. Chapter 7

"Maddie! Come on, honey, I want a picture of you and Dustin in your costumes!"

Maddie sighed, smoothing down the short skirt she was wearing and adjusting her golden headband.

"Coming, Ma!"

She grabbed her purse before heading out of her room, meeting her mother in the living room. Dustin was decked out in his Ghostbusters outfit, which her and her mother had spent weeks making for him. He grinned at her, giving a thumbs-up.

"You look *awesome*."

Maddie smiled at him, ruffling his hair. "C'mon, Spengler. Let's take this picture then get a move on."

Their mother smiled brightly, holding up the Polaroid. "Say cheese!"

"Cheeseeee," the kids chorused, giving corny smiles.

---

"What time are you coming home, Dustin?" Maddie asked, ensuring her brother knew what time he was expected home.

"Ten thirty," he recited. "And no, I won't be late."

"Have fun, be safe, love you!" she said, growing louder as Dustin moved away from her open window.

She pulled out the flier for Tina's party, heading to the address printed at the bottom. She heard it before she saw it, muffled music vibrating her truck as she tried to find a place to park. She made her way to the front door, squeezing past several people who were far too drunk for it to only be eight o' clock. She found her way into the kitchen only to be met by a high-pitched squeal.

"You're here!" Blaire said excitedly, wrapping her arms around

Maddie's shoulders. She stepped back, examining Maddie's costume. "Lookin' good Wonder Woman!"

"Not bad yourself, Black Canary," Maddie replied, a smirk gracing her face.

The two girls grinned at each other before Blaire dragged her towards the living room, which was set up as a sort of dance floor. The two girls joined the massive crowd and starting dancing to the music pounding through the room. Maddie was laughing at some ridiculous move that Blaire was doing when someone pushed passed them, nearly knocking Maddie over.

"Hey! Watch where you're going, douchebag!" Blaire cried, helping Maddie steady herself.

He turned back towards them, taking a drag of his cigarette as he looked them both over. "Any chance that where I'm going is straight back to you two?" he asked, smirking cockily at them.

Blaire scoffed at him, while Maddie rolled her eyes as she recognized him. He was the new kid, from California or something.

"Get lost, asshole," Maddie said, turning away from him. She felt two heavy hands on her bare shoulders and the scent of cigarette smoke and beer became closer.

"I already got lost in your eyes, sweetheart," he said, his voice dripping with confidence.

Maddie tensed under his touch, fear making her blood run cold. Blaire made eye contact with her and took a step towards them.

"Get. Your. Hands. Off. Of. Me," she said through her teeth, hoping she came through as angry and not scared out of her wits.

He just chuckled and removed his hands. "I'll see you two later, then."

He walked off and was joined by Tommy H., who guided him straight towards Steve. The boys held each other's glare, each trying to intimidate the other. Nancy rolled her eyes and walked off and Maddie turned back to Blaire.

"You okay?" the blonde asked lowly, putting a hand on Maddie's arm.

Maddie forced a smile at her friend. "Yeah, fine."

---

### *Two Weeks Earlier*

She had woken up in her own bed. The sunlight streaming through her window caused her to wince, the splitting headache she had growing worse. She groaned, sitting up slowly as she rubbed her temples. Try as she might, the memories she had of the night before were foggy, and she couldn't quite bring them into focus.

A noise on the right side of her made her turn her head, and she cringed at the dizziness that followed. Blaire came into her line of sight, the blonde girl squinting her eyes at the brightness of the room. She turned to Maddie, her eyes growing slightly wider as she scrambled to stand, wringing her hands as she looked Maddie over.

"Hey. Hey, how're you feeling?" she asked softly, and Maddie furrowed her eyebrows.

"Like I got hit by a truck. What- what happened last night?" Maddie said, trying to wade through her sluggish memories.

"Uhm, well, I'm not quite sure. I found you upstairs. The cops were there so I was trying to hide, and, uh, you were passed out on the bed," Blaire replied cautiously, choosing her words carefully as she watched Maddie for a reaction.

Suddenly, everything started coming back to her. Kevin's face flashed in her mind, and she felt nauseous.

"Oh, I'm gonna be sick," Maddie groaned, putting a hand on her head.

"Do you need some water?" Blaire asked, rushing to grab a glass from Maddie's nightstand and pushing it into Maddie's hand.

Maddie accepted, taking a sip before putting it back on the nightstand and running to the bathroom. She emptied her stomach into the toilet, coughing slightly as she slumped onto the ground. Blaire appeared in the doorway, concern masking her face. Maddie

took deep, stuttering breaths, trying to regain her composure, but was cut off by another wave of nausea. She shut her eyes, attempting to wipe the night before from her memory.

"Are you okay?" Blaire finally asked, watching her friend.

Maddie nodded before shaking her head. "No."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Her eyes started to tear up involuntarily. "No."

Blaire moved into the bathroom, sitting next to Maddie as she wrapped her arms around the brunette's shoulders. Maddie sniffled, trying to keep her tears in, but eventually allowed herself to let out a sob.

---

### *Present*

Maddie fanned herself, sweat rolling down her neck as she tried to escape the living room to the kitchen. She made her way over to the drinks, grabbing a cup as she looked at her options. Beer, beer, and more beer greeted her, and she turned to the countertop behind her. An unhealthily red punch sat in a bowl before her, next to several bottles of liquor. She sighed, putting the cup back as she went back to find Blaire. She walked through the entryway, nearly running into someone as they came through the front door.

"Hey, what's- Jonathan!" she cried, hugging him excitedly.

"Hey, Maddie," he said, returning the hug.

"What are you doing here? I thought you had to watch Will?" Maddie asked, stepping back from him.

"Well, uh, I did, but I figured I would give the kid a little room to breathe, y'know?" he said, shoving his hands in pockets.

"Yeah, I can see that. How is he doing by the way?"

A collective gasp from the crowded living room cut their

conversation, and they turned to the kitchen, where an offended-looking, and incredibly wasted, Nancy stood at the center of attention. Red liquid dripped down her shirt, making small puddles on the floor. Steve stood across from her, mouth gaping as he stared at her ruined blouse.

"What... the hell?" Nancy mumbled, storming through the living room and up the stairs.

Steve followed after her, pushing past the now-silenced party. Maddie watched him go, her eyes lingering on the stairs for a few moments after he left. Jonathan cleared his throat, making her return her focus to him. They continued their conversation, the subject shifting from Will to school to track to photography until Steve suddenly rushed past them, shoving his way through the people packed into the entryway. The pair watched him leave, and Jonathan motioned out the door with his thumb.

"Aren't you gonna go check on him?" he asked, his eyebrows raising quizzically.

"No. No, I don't think so. I think I'm actually gonna go, but you might need to..." she trailed off, motioning at the stairs.

He nodded, and they parted ways, Maddie making her way around the house in search of Blaire. She circled through the kitchen, avoiding drunk teenagers and spilled punch as she looked for the familiar blonde hair. She finally found the girl leaning against a wall as she flirted with an upperclassman. Maddie cleared her throat and Blaire sent her a sheepish smile, saying farewell to the boy before joining Maddie.

"Sorry to be a buzzkill, but I told my mom I'd be back before eleven," Maddie said, half-hearted in her apology.

"Nah, I don't mind. It's not a good idea to get wasted on a school night anyways," Blaire replied, shrugging as they left the house.

The girls chatted as they made their way towards Maddie's truck, but their conversation died down when they saw Billy Hargrove leaning against the Mustang next to it. He shot them a smirk as he took a

drag of a cigarette, exhaling slowly as the girls quickened their pace to the truck. He flicked the butt onto the pavement, grinding it beneath the toe of his boot before sauntering over to them. Maddie fumbled to find her keys as she tried to move faster but dropped them in her rush. She bent to pick them up, only to be stopped by a large hand covering them.

She looked up to see Billy towering over her, a devilish smile on his face as he dangled the keys from his hand. She swallowed hard and stood, reaching for them. He laughed as he moved his hand, taking them farther from her reach. Maddie made an irritated noise, crossing her arms over her chest as she waited for the boy to hand over her keys.

Billy let his eyes drag over her figure before finally holding the keys out for her. "You know, you should be more careful about being alone out here after dark, especially in that outfit."

*You should be careful; these parties can be dangerous.*

Maddie shuddered slightly as Kevin's voice invaded her thoughts, snatching her keys from Billy and unlocking the door. She let Blaire in and hurriedly started the vehicle, desperate to get away from the still-smirking boy outside.

Maddie sighed as she pulled into her driveway, turning off the truck as she came to a stop. She allowed herself to sit inside for a moment, collecting her thoughts, before making her way to the door. She heard footsteps behind her and turned, smiling tiredly at the appearance of her little brother.

"Hey kiddo, how was trick-or-treating?" She asked, slowing as she waited for him to catch up.

He held up his bag excitedly. "I got, like, five 3 Musketeers bars!"

She chuckled, slinging an arm around his shoulders. "Well, at least one of us had fun."

Her statement was followed by a rattling noise from the trashcan and the two siblings froze, eyes glued to the metal. The noise came again,



along with the shaking of the trashcan, and Dustin hesitantly walked towards it.

"Dustin, what the hell are you doing?" Maddie hissed, reaching a hand out to stop her brother.

"I'm just trying to see what it is," he said, slowly taking the lid off of the top. "Holy shit. Maddie, come look at this!"

She took a few tentative steps towards it, sure that her brother was going to try and scare her. "I swear to God, Dustin, if this is some bullshit prank-"

"It's not, I swear," he said, holding up the lid higher so she could see.

"What the hell?"

---

Her eyelids fluttered slightly, making her jerk herself awake.

Maddie rubbed her eyes tiredly, yawning as Mr. Lappison continued to drone on about theoretical laws of Calculus. She hardly wanted to listen, especially after the late night Dustin had put her through last night.

Neither of them were quite sure what they had found, but they knew it was *definitely* not normal. They had snuck it past their mother (which was relatively easy), and into Dustin's room. Poor Yertle had gotten evicted, "D'artagnan" being put in his place. Dustin had promised to get rid of it by this afternoon, and Maddie planned to hold him to that promise. The thing gave her the creeps, and she hardly wanted her mother to find it.

The bell rang, releasing class, and Maddie made her way towards the parking lot. She had a shift at Oma's, and she was not going to make it through without a cup of coffee. She pulled into work, sipping her coffee as she went to the back, waving at Mr. Henson, the manager. She pulled on her uniform, trading her Hawkins High Athletics t-shirt for a bubblegum pink polo and black skirt. Maddie took a deep breath, scraping her hair back into a ponytail before walking into the front, the bell on the door ringing as the after-school rush began.

---

"Mom! Dustin! I'm home!" Maddie called, letting the door shut behind her.

Silence greeted her, and she let out a huff of air. Her mother had been more absent lately, and she felt like she was the adult of the house most of the time. Especially when she had to take care of her younger brother, not that she minded. She stopped at Dustin's door, opening it quietly in case he was asleep. He was out of bed, speaking softly as he stood in front of Yertle's terrarium. He moved to grab something and Maddie involuntarily gasped.

"What the *hell*, Dustin!" she said, closing the door in case their mom came home.

He turned, dropping the 3 Musketeers bar he was holding. "Maddie! Don't scare me like that!"

"Don't scare you? You have a giant slug-thing in your room, and you're talking about *me* scaring *you*?" Maddie hissed, gesturing wildly at Dart.

"Actually, I think he's a pollywog," Dustin corrected, pointing his 3 Musketeers at her.

Maddie sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Whatever. I want that *thing* out of the house by tomorrow, deal?"

Dustin opened his mouth to protest but Maddie held up a finger to cut him off. "Tomorrow."

He sighed and nodded, his shoulders slumping slightly. "Fine."

"Goodnight, you turd. Love you," she said, hugging him before heading to the bathroom to shower.

"Love you too," he mumbled, his attitude soured.

---

Maddie was *not* ready for the double shift she had after school.

Signing herself up for it was quite possibly the worst idea she had had in a while. Or ever. She opened her driver's side, putting her

backpack on the middle seat when a knock on her hood startled her from her thoughts. She turned to see Billy Hargrove smirking at her through the window.

She rolled her eyes and closed the door, leaning against it as she spoke. "What do you want?"

"What? No 'nice to see you?'" He said, pulling the cigarette from between his teeth and lighting it.

"Sorry, I only reserve my manners for men who don't act like complete douchebags."

The cocky smirk he had on faltered slightly, but he recovered quickly, taking a drag of the cigarette and exhaling a cloud of smoke towards her. She coughed lightly, waving a hand to clear the air. He inhaled again, his large frame mountainous compared to her petite one.

"Look, you seem really tense. Maybe you could, uh, come over to my place and release some of that. I have a lot of experience when it comes to relaxation techniques," he said, leaning on the door while facing her.

Maddie suppressed a gag, wrinkling her nose in disgust instead. "Yeah, I'll pass."

She moved to open the door but Billy closed it. "Come on, what the deal? Why won't you just give me a chance?"

"Move." Maddie replied through gritted teeth.

"Not till you tell me yes," Billy said, blocking her way. "What's the big deal? Most girls would be *begging* for this opportunity."

"She said to move," a new voice chimed in, making them both turn towards the owner.

Steve was leaning a hip against Maddie's hood. His eyes never left Billy, and he crossed his arms over his chest. Billy scoffed, flicking his cigarette at Steve's feet.

"Fine. See you around, princess," he said, giving Maddie one last suggestive smirk before walking off.

"You okay?" Steve asked, stepping towards her.

"Yeah. Fine. Thanks," she said, running a hand through her cola-colored waves.

Steve shrugged, kicking at the ground lightly. "Yeah, no problem."

They stood in silence for a moment, staring at some unfixed point in the concrete between them.

"So, uh, thanks again, but I gotta get goin', so," Maddie said, starting to open her truck.

"Wait, Mads. I-" he sighed, ruffling a hand through his hair. "I miss you. I miss us."

Maddie paused, thinking over his words. "Yeah, well, I don't, alright? Thanks for the help with Billy, but I think it's best if we don't talk to each other anymore."

Steve stared at her, his mouth agape as she climbed into the seat. She turned the key, starting it, and he finally walked away, pausing to look back at her. She bit her lip as she shifted gears, pulling out of the parking lot and onto Smith Street. Tears pricked at her eyes and she swiped at them violently.

"Damn it. *Damn it.*" She repeated, running the edges of her sleeve underneath her eyes.

She hadn't meant a damn word of it, but if pushing Steve away was what kept her safe, then so be it.

**A/N: I'm so sorry this took so long! I've had a bunch of stuff going on, so I'm trying to balance school, work, and these stories along with personal issues. I'm not abandoning it I promise! We are starting to get into Season 2, so yay! Let me know what you think in the comments below, and follow/fave for notifs! Onto guest reviews!**

**Guest the best:** Thanks! I try to do longer chapters when I update since I update at such strange times. You can totally write your story! I so believe in you, you got this!

**Guest:** Here's your update! Sorry it took so long!

**RedVelevetPanPan:** I've missed you, friend! Hope you are enjoying the story and your chapters!

## 8. Chapter 8

Maddie sighed as she stretched her arms above her head. She had finally finished her shift at Oma's and the only thing on her mind was getting home for a hot shower and a pair of clothes that didn't smell like grease. She tossed a wave at a few people from school as she left and got in her truck. The ride home was fairly uneventful, and she pulled into her driveway while her mother was walking towards her car.

"Hey, Mom. Where are you heading off to?" Maddie asked as her mother gave her a quick peck on the cheek before getting into the driver's side of the car.

"Oh, I think Mews got out and now she's lost but the McCorkles called and said they saw her over by Loch Nora so I'm gonna go look, but can you stay here with Dusty, please?" her mother replied, sniffing as she fixed her makeup in the rearview mirror.

"Yeah, sure, no problem. Good luck," Maddie said, giving her mother a small smile before trudging inside. "Dustin? Hey, what do you want for dinner? I'm starving, and pizza sounds really good right about now," she called down the hallway as she hung her coat on the hook by the front door.

When there was no response, she started towards his room before knocking on the closed door. "Dusty? You in there?" she asked, twisting the knob to open it.

"DON'T!" Dustin yelled from the end of the hallway as he ran towards her. In a catcher's mask. And hockey pads. With a bag of bologna.

Maddie removed her hand from the doorknob in confusion as she stared at her little brother. "What the hell are you wearing? Halloween was yesterday, Dustin," she joked, the smile dropping from her face as she saw her brother's grim expression.

"Okay, for real, Dustin, what's going on?" she asked, her heart suddenly beating a little faster.

"I'll explain later, but for now," he pulled open the bag of bologna, "you should get your old softball gear on and meet me in the shed."

Maddie almost rolled her eyes at him, but the serious edge to Dustin's voice made her actually listen to him and head out to the storage closet. She fished through some piles of junk before coming to her junior high softball pads from when she was a catcher and pulled them on. Dustin had taken her mask, so she left her head bare and grabbed her bat instead. She made her way out to the shed (not very gracefully, due to the extra weight), and opened it to see Dustin crouching by the wall. He jumped at the sound of the door opening before pulling her down next to him.

"Okay, now can you tell me what the hell is going on?" Maddie asked, thoroughly annoyed with her brother's mysteriousness.

"Um, okay, so, remember how you told me to get rid of Dart?"

"Yes," she replied, her eyes narrowing.

"And you know how I'm really bad at listening?" Dustin said, his eyes trained on the back door of the house.

"Dustin, what did you do?" Maddie hissed.

"Uhm, well, I didn't get rid of Dart, if that's what you're asking," he said nervously, glancing at her out of the corner of his eye.

"Damn it, Dustin! What happened?" she asked again, pinching the bridge of her nose.

"Ah, well, he uh, he grew. And now he kinda looks like that," Dustin said, nodding at the yard.

Maddie turned her eyes to the leaves in front of them and her jaw dropped. There was *no* way that was Dart. They had found a slug, not whatever the hell was standing in her yard, scarfing down bologna. He stopped eating for a second and looked straight at them. Maddie let out an involuntary squeak and Dustin's eyes got wide.

"Shit," he breathed, waiting for Dart to make a move as they both jumped back from their spot on the wall. When they turned to look at

Dart again, he had completely turned towards them, and had gotten closer.

They pulled away from the wall of the shed, breathing heavily, and looked at each other. Dustin licked his lips before nodding at Maddie. She looked incredulously at him and shook her head. He nodded again, and she put her head back with a groan before they both charged out of the shed, screaming. Dart screeched and started running towards the storm cellar, which he was knocked into with Dustin's hockey stick. Maddie ran towards the open doors and closed them right as Dart started running back up the stairs. The siblings laid on top of the doors, holding them closed as Dart tried to break free.

"I'm sorry, you ate my cat," Dustin said, addressing Dart.

"It ate Mews?!"

---

"Guys, this is Dustin again. Does anyone copy? This is a code red. I repeat, a code red!" Dustin said, shoveling dirt into the shallow grave that he and Maddie had dug for Mews. She sent him a look, putting another shovelful of earth in the hole. He waited for a few moments to see if someone would respond before sighing and continuing to fill in the hole.

Dustin had gone onto the radio after they were sure that Dart wasn't going to get out and called for backup. Hopper hadn't answered, and neither had the party. Maddie had finally gotten him to tell her what had happened while they had dug, with her interjecting occasionally, with questions or comments. The boys had wanted to get rid of Dart (which was smart) and Dustin had refused and snuck Dart home instead (which was stupid). Dart got a little bigger every time it ate and was now at the size it was because it had eaten Mews (Mom was gonna be heartbroken). And now, they were trying to get someone to pick up and help them figure out what the hell to do.

"Okay, we need to go clean up my room, so Mom doesn't find out," Dustin said, breathing heavily as they finished filling in the hole.

Maddie nodded and wiped some sweat from her brow as they moved



inside. She put all their gear back into the storage closet as Dustin got the cleaning supplies.

"I really need someone to pick up here. Hopper's MIA, and I've got a code red. Code red!" she heard Dustin say as he pulled out various cans of cleaner. He met her in the hallway and handed her a pair of gloves before pushing the door to his room open.

Maddie almost gagged at the smell. "Oh, Dustin."

He grimaced before stepping inside, with Maddie trailing after him. They pulled all the furniture away from the wall before dousing the stain with carpet cleaner. Maddie started on the wall while Dustin scrubbed at the carpet. He paused to turn on his headset and start speaking into it again.

"All right, it's Dustin again. Seriously, I have a code red." He sat up quickly after saying it and Maddie stopped to look at him.

"Erica? Erica, is Lucas there? Where is he?" Dustin paused again before speaking.

"Is he with Mike?"

"Please tell him it's super important. Please tell him that I have a code-"

"Yep, code red. Exactly."

"Erica?"

He let out a groan before sitting back on his heels. Maddie looked at him sadly as he rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. They resumed their scrubbing in silence, finally cleaning up the last trace of Mews. Maddie finished picking up the various items they had left strewn about the house while Dustin called Mike's house for the twelfth time.

"Son of a bitch!" he muttered, hanging up the phone before picking it up and redialing.

Maddie rolled her eyes at her brother. "If the line's busy, it's not going

to get unbusy within the next 30 seconds."

Dustin stuck his tongue out at her and she did the same before putting away the cleaning supplies. After they had both showered and put on a change of clothing, Dustin tried again. When his efforts proved unfruitful, he cursed and kicked the cabinets lightly.

"Why don't you just go over there?" Maddie called from the couch, her eyes remaining closed.

He stilled in the kitchen, his fingers poised over the first digit of Mike's phone number. "What?"

Maddie snorted and sat up, looking at her brother. "Yeah, y'know, go over there? And physically speak to him?" Dustin rolled his eyes at her but hung the phone up all the same.

"Come on, I'll drive you," she said with a sigh, pushing herself off the couch.

Or at least she'd thought she would. Maddie groaned and tried to start the truck again. A buzzing sound greeted her, letting her know that the battery was dead.

"Dammit!" she swore, hitting the steering wheel. "Sorry, kiddo. Looks like we're walking to the Wheeler's."

---

"Your line has been busy for over two hours, Mr. Wheeler. Do you realize this?"

"Oh, I do realize," Mr. Wheeler responded, leaning against the doorframe.

"Is Mike home?" Dustin asked, exasperated.

"No."

"No? Well, where the hell is he?"

"Karen, where's our son?" He paused for the answer. "Will's."

"No one's picking up there," Dustin murmured, his head drooping slightly.

Maddie chimed in. "Nancy. What about Nancy?"

"Karen, where's Nancy?" Another pause. "Ally's," Mr. Wheeler said, a sarcastic smirk crossing his face. "Our children don't live here anymore. You didn't know that?"

"Seriously?" Dustin said, his eyebrows raised.

"Am I done here?"

"Son of a bitch. You're really no help at all, you know that?" Dustin said, turning and walking down the sidewalk.

Maddie's eyes widened at Dustin's words.

"Hey! Language," Mr. Wheeler called down the walkway.

"Mr. Wheeler, I am so sorry, I don't know what's gotten into him. And my apologies for saying this, but you really aren't any help," Maddie said before running after Dustin.

Mr. Wheeler tossed his arms up in bewilderment before disappearing back into the living room. The two Henderson children stood on the curb, and Dustin huffed.

"Now what?" Maddie asked him, but his response was cut off by a car pulling up to the house. Steve stepped out of the car with a fistful of roses and started walking up to the door, mumbling to himself. Dustin took a step towards him, but Maddie caught his arm, stopping him.

"What are you doing?" she hissed.

"He could help us. You told me he helped you last year, right?" Dustin said, confused by her reluctance to ask Steve for help.

Maddie sighed, but was unable to come up with a reason for Steve not to get involved. Dustin started walking towards him again, calling his name. Steve looked up, noticing the two for the first time.

"Are those for Mr. or Mrs. Wheeler?" Dustin asked, gesturing towards the flowers.

"No," Steve replied, switching between looking at Dustin and looking at Maddie. She looked away, putting a hand on the back of her neck.

Dustin nodded, grabbing the flowers from Steve's hand. "Good."

"Hey. What the hell? Hey!" Steve said, picking up his keys before turning to face Dustin.

"Nancy isn't home," Dustin said matter-of-factly opening the passenger's side door.

"Where is she?"

"Doesn't matter. We have bigger problems than your love life. Do you still have that bat?"

"Bat? What bat?" Steve asked, confused as to why Dustin was asking him.

"The one with the nails?" Dustin replied, waving the flowers for effect.

Steve shifted his weight uneasily, his eyes narrowing at Dustin's questions. "Why?"

Dustin rolled his eyes and got in the seat, "I'll explain it on the way."

"Wh- Now?" Steve asked, jogging towards the driver's side.

"Now! Maddie, come on!" Dustin yelled, waving her over to the car.

Maddie sighed and rolled her eyes, hesitant. Steve stared at her as he watched to see what she would do. At another one of Dustin's insistent cries, she finally walked over to the back of Steve's car.

"Where are we going?" Steve asked, starting the car.

Dustin and Maddie exchanged glances, silently arguing before Maddie finally sat back in her seat, huffing. Dustin looked at Steve

seriously. "You know how to get to our house?"

---

The ride to the house was spent mostly explaining what had happened with Dart to Steve. Dustin had told the story while Maddie sat in the back seat looking out the window. Steve was a tad incredulous when the story began but when Dustin told him about Mews, he finally fell quiet with his argument. The remainder of the drive was silent, save for the radio playing one of Steve's cassette tapes.

They finally pulled up to the house and Maddie practically jumped out of the car, the tension nearly choking her it was so thick. Steve popped the trunk and tossed the keys to Dustin as he picked up the bat. Maddie swallowed hard at the sight of it, the adrenaline from last year's events filling her veins once again. She and Steve exchanged glances as he closed the trunk and followed Dustin to the backyard. He turned on a flashlight when it got hard to see and they all filed silently towards the storm cellar. The trio came to a stop and stared at the closed doors.

"I don't hear shit," Steve said, shifting as he listened for a sign of life.

"He's in there," Maddie said, annoyed at his disbelief of her and Dustin's story.

Steve glanced at her, licking his lips before hitting the doors a few times with the bat. When there was no movement, he turned to Dustin, shining the flashlight in his face. "All right, listen, kid. I swear, if this is some sort of Halloween prank, you're dead."

"It's not," Dustin replied, squinting against the light. "It's not a prank. Get it out of my face."

"You got a key for this thing?" Steve asked the siblings, nodding towards the doors.

Dustin nodded and went inside to grab it, leaving Steve and Maddie to stand around awkwardly. He cleared his throat and ran a hand through his hair as Maddie shifted, biting her lip as she looked anywhere but Steve's direction.

"So, uh, are you... okay?" He finally asked after a long pause. Maddie shrugged, making Steve sigh. "Look, Maddie, I know you hate me now or whatever, but I just want to know how you're doing."

"How I'm doing? Well, okay, let's see," Maddie said, whipping around to face Steve. She held up a hand and ticked off each finger as she listed an item. "For starters, one of my best friends abandoned me at a party after introducing me to a certified douchebag and left me alone with him, a different douchebag won't stop badgering me at school, my mother isn't home most of the time and when she is, the height of her activity is feeding the cat, which is now dead and buried in my backyard because my little brother decided to rescue whatever is now in the storm cellar. So, yeah, I'm just fantastic, thanks for asking," Maddie snapped, crossing her arms as she glared at a now-wincing Steve.

He opened his mouth to respond but Dustin interrupted their conversation by running down the back steps and waving the key triumphantly. He tossed it to Steve, who caught it and opened the padlock. He opened the doors cautiously, half-expecting something to jump out at him. He stared down the stairs as Dustin came up next to him, holding the flashlight shakily. Steve took it from him and pointed it into the cellar, looking for any sign of movement.

"He must be further down there," Dustin said, peering over Steve's shoulder. Maddie came up behind them and looked into the cellar.

"I'll stay up here in case he tries to... escape," Dustin said, making Maddie and Steve look at him and shake their heads. Steve sighed, looking back down the stairs.

Maddie grabbed the flashlight from him and gestured at the cellar with it. "Come on, I'll go behind you."

The two went down the stairs slowly, Steve gripping the bat tightly as he scanned the room. Maddie moved the light around, illuminating the floor as they walked until they came to the overhead light. She reached out for the string and pulled it, making them both squint at the suddenness of the light. Steve looked down at the floor at the same time Maddie did, making them exchange a glance. He poked at the pile of slime with his bat before scooping some onto the end.

"Jesus Christ. What the hell is that?" Maddie asked, making Steve shake his head.

"I don't know, but it may have something to do with *that*," he responded, nodding at the corner.

"Steve? Maddie? What's going on down there?" Dustin's voice reached their ears faintly.

Steve moved to the bottom of the stairs, shining the flashlight up at Dustin. "get down here."

Dustin came down the stairs and followed Steve over to where Maddie was standing, staring at the gaping hole in the corner of their cellar.

"Oh, shit!" Dustin said, putting a hand to his head.

"It gets worse," Maddie said, point down the hole with the flashlight so Dustin could see how far it went.

"No way. No way," Dustin breathed, voicing all three's thoughts as they crouched in front of the hole.

---

They had moved to the living room, not keen on the idea of being in the cellar if Dart decided to come back. Steve was getting a glass of water in the kitchen, Maddie was slouched in the corner of the couch, and Dustin was frantically pacing the length of the living room, muttering under his breath. Steve returned from the kitchen and set three glasses of water on the coffee table before sitting next to Maddie. She focused her attention on a stain on the carpet, not giving Steve a second look as Dustin continued to pace.

"Okay, so what happens next? Should we just leave it alone?" Dustin said, finally addressing Maddie and Steve.

"We can't just leave him out there. You saw how big he was getting, Dustin, and he could definitely do some damage," Maddie said, shaking her head emphatically.

Dustin threw his hands up. "Well, I don't know what to do, okay?!"

"Last year, with the demogorgon, Nancy and Jonathan drew it to them and set a trap. What if we did the same thing?" Steve said, resting his chin in his hand. Maddie didn't miss the way his voice faltered at Nancy's name. She had heard rumors at school about what had happened at the Halloween party, but hadn't paid them any mind. Now she wished she had at least half-listened to the gossip Blaire told her at lunch everyday.

"Okay, where should we set the trap then?" Dustin asked himself, starting to pace again before stopping midstride. "The old junkyard."

"Now the question is how to get Dart there," Steve said, taking a sip of water.

"Dustin got him out to the cellar with bologna, so why not the same thing? This week marked the end of the month, so the diner will be tossing out any meat that went bad. I could get us some if you guys can figure out what to do when we get Dart to the junkyard," Maddie replied, glancing between Dustin and Steve.

"Well, burning the thing worked last time, might as well do it again," Steve said, smiling humorlessly.

"So, it's settled," Dustin said, clapping his hands together. "We'll get the meat and some gasoline and try not to get ourselves killed."

"Sounds foolproof to me" Maddie responded dryly, standing and pulling on a jacket. "Let's go."

---

Maddie let out a grunt as she placed a pail of raw meat in the back of Steve's car. Steve set one down soon after her and shut the trunk, twirling his keys on his index finger as they walked around to the front of the car. Dustin had sat in the back this time, forcing Maddie to sit with Steve in the front. Steve started the car and slipped a new cassette tape into the player. Maddie skipped the first song as they pulled out from behind the diner.

"I thought you liked that song," Steve said, confusion lacing his tone.

"*Liked*. Past tense," Maddie replied shortly, turning to look out the



window.

Uncomfortable silence settled over the car as they drove to the store. Steve drummed his fingers against the wheel as he tried to come up with a topic to talk about. He gave up after a few moments, knowing it was pointless anyways. Maddie wouldn't speak to him unless it was necessary. He had been trying to figure out what had happened at the party that was so bad she wouldn't speak to him anymore, but he had come up with nothing. Not even Nancy knew.

He had approached Blaire to try to get something out of her, but all the blonde would tell him was that he screwed up and he would have to ask Maddie. He had concluded that it had something to do with Kevin, but other than that it was a mystery. All he knew was that it had cost him his best friend, and he had absolutely no idea how to get her back.

They pulled into the parking lot and piled out of the car, each person assigned to a certain aisle. Steve was to get gasoline, Maddie was to get a lighter, and Dustin was to get batteries. They split up, each going to find their own thing. Maddie picked up a basic lighter and made her way to Dustin's aisle. He was crouching in the middle of it, holding two different packs of batteries. He picked one as she walked up, and they started towards the checkout line, where Steve would be waiting for them.

"So, what happened between you and Steve? Like I know you guys haven't hung out in a while but he's trying to help us, and you're just kind of being mean to him," Dustin asked, making Maddie pause in her steps.

"None of your business, twerp," Maddie replied, trying to be lighthearted. Dustin's concerned look made her sigh and pull him aside. "Look, sometimes people make bad decisions or do bad things to you, and you just can't be friends with them or hang out with them anymore."

"So, he did something bad?"

"Not Steve, specifically, but he was the reason that somebody else did a bad thing. So, I'm protecting myself and making sure I don't get

hurt again. Make sense?"

Dustin nodded slowly. "So, you're going to stay away from him so nothing bad happens, even if he didn't do it? Even though you still like him?"

"Yes, even though he didn't do it. Even if I do still like him," Maddie replied quietly, starting to walk again.

Steve waved at them from the checkout line, getting their attention. Maddie lifted a hand to show that they saw him. Dustin watched the two as they checked out. Every time Steve thought Maddie wasn't paying attention, he would give her sad looks. Like he missed her. Dustin couldn't help but wonder what had happened. Maybe Steve would tell him later.

*After they captured Dart, of course.*

**A/n: Wowwww I'm so sorry for how long it's been since I updated this. I missed you guys! The mini hiatus I went on was because of school taking over my life, but hopefully I will be able to update more often now! I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, please let me know what you think in the review section and know that I love all of you!**

**Review Replies:**

**Guest: Here's your next update! Hope you enjoyed it!**

**Sukondis: Girl, me too. Let's be real. It may get written in later on**

## 9. Chapter 9

In hindsight, carrying three pails of raw meat to lure a monster out of hiding while they only had a hockey stick and a bat to defend themselves was probably not the best plan.

Maddie chose to blame her compliance on her sleep-deprived, traumatized brain. She trailed behind Steve and Dustin, tossing bits from her pail occasionally. Their conversation floated back to her, but she was too exhausted to care enough to eavesdrop.

"Hold on you're not falling for this girl-" Steve cut himself off with a small grunt as Maddie ran into him, her eyes widening with an apology as soon as it happened. In her defense, he *had* just stopped abruptly in the middle of their path.

"Cause she'll just break your heart, and you're way too young for that shit," he finished, glancing at Maddie as he helped steady her. She sent him a small nod in thanks before hanging back and letting Steve and Dustin continue.

At least she tried to, before Steve stopped *again*, this time to threaten her brother. Maddie kept her annoyance to herself, choosing instead to step around them and take the lead. A tug on her arm a few minutes later made her look next to her to see Dustin staring earnestly at her.

"So, I told Steve what you told me earlier, and he said he still likes you too and wants you guys to be friends again and I-" Maddie whirled around, cutting him off midsentence.

"You did *what*?" she hissed, trying to be quiet enough to where Steve wouldn't hear.

Dustin's face drained of color, a realization of what he had just said hitting him. "Shit."

"Shit is right, you twerp. Why the *hell* would you say that?" Maddie said, continuing to walk.

"I just thought if you both liked each other and stopped being mad at each other then you could be friends again, cause Steve's not as much of an asshole as I thought he was and he's pretty cool and I don't know, I thought it would be good," Dustin babbled as he jogged ahead to catch up with her.

Maddie sighed, tossing a handful of meat on the ground with more force than necessary. "It's not just about liking each other, Dustin. It's just more complicated than that."

"Maybe it shouldn't be," Dustin said, returning his focus to emptying his pail.

"Oh yeah. This'll do good. Good idea, kid," Steve said, nudging Dustin before moving to see the rest of the junkyard.

Dustin sent a bright smile to Maddie, making his older sister roll her eyes before emptying out the remnants of her bucket.

"I said medium-well!" a voice called from behind them, causing the two siblings to turn and face the small hill. Lucas and a girl that was unfamiliar to Maddie started down towards them. The look on Dustin's face made her think that the girl was a little more than just a friend.

Maddie and Steve exchanged glances across Dustin's head, something she found a small comfort in. Like they were back to normal. The moment soon passed, and they were quick to start moving the supplies they needed towards the bus.

Dustin and Lucas disappeared behind a rusted car to discuss something "serious", leaving Maddie, Steve, and the girl that had arrived with Lucas to gather scraps and materials. The younger redhead was struggling with a particularly large piece of sheet metal when Maddie came to help her.

"Let's lift on one, two, three," Maddie grunted, pulling the metal up as they both waddled towards the bus.

A heavy sigh of relief sounded from both girls as they set it down. "I'm Maddie, by the way," Maddie said, brushing her hands off on her

jeans. "I'm Dustin's older sister."

"Max," The younger girl replied, nodding to Maddie.

They both jumped at the sound of Steve pounding a pipe on the hood of the car that the boys were hiding behind. He yelled something at them, causing the two to get up and start moving metal. Maddie sighed and tightened her ponytail. They were in for a long night.

---

She really needed to do more lifting during offseason.

Her arms now rubbery and her face effectively smeared with grime from the junkyard, Maddie flopped down on the floor of the bus, leaning her head against the wall as she let her eyes drift shut for a few moments. A movement on her right made her shift slightly, but her eyes remained closed. A clicking sound that she recognized as the opening of a lighter finally made her look to see Steve sitting next to her, a distant look on his face as he flipped the lighter in his hand. A part of her wanted to protest his closeness, but her legs wanted to rest more than she wanted to move away from him.

"So, you really fought one of these things before?" Max finally asked, addressing Steve. He glanced at her before nodding slowly, the lighter never stilling in his hand.

"And you're, like, totally, 100% sure it wasn't a bear?" she said, her eyebrows raising.

"Shit. Don't be an idiot. Okay? It wasn't a bear. Why are you even here if you don't believe us? Just go home," Dustin said, irritation lacing his voice, as he turned to face Max.

Maddie's eyes widened as Max's did. She was just about to scold her brother when Max responded.

"Geesh. Someone's cranky. Past your bedtime?" she retorted before climbing up the ladder to join Lucas on the roof.

Steve laughed quietly before Maddie nudged him, motioning towards Dustin with her head as she rolled her eyes. Steve bit his lip before nodding lightly.

"That's good. Just show her you don't care," he said approvingly, turning his attention to Dustin.

Dustin wrinkled his nose as he continued pacing. "I don't."

Steve gave him a knowing face as he winked at the younger boy. Dustin furrowed his eyebrows and paused, shaking his head.

"Why are you winking, Steve? Stop."

Dustin had finally given up on pacing, choosing to sink down next to Maddie and rest his head against the wall.

Maddie nudged her brother's shoulder. "Hey, you okay?"

Dustin straightened. "Yeah. Why wouldn't I be?"

"I dunno, you just seemed kinda down when Lucas and Max showed up together," Maddie replied, shrugging.

"I'm fine. They can do whatever they want together. I don't care," Dustin said, mumbling as he trailed off, his attention drifting to the small opening on the top of the bus that Max had climbed through.

Maddie just nodded instead of responding, choosing to keep her opinion to herself rather than further antagonize her brother. He sighed again and shifted before standing back up, moving to the front of the bus to peer through a crack in one of the windows. Maddie stayed where she was, letting her head lay back and her eyes drift shut as the feeling of how tired she was caught up with her.

Steve's eyes wandered over to Maddie's form. She looked peaceful. Maybe for the first time in a long time, or at least since the incident. He had all but given up on them recovering from what had happened before Dustin had told him otherwise this morning.

---

"She doesn't hate you, you know."

He had paused, confused by Dustin's sudden statement to break the quiet crunching of rocks underneath their shoes.

"Maddie. She doesn't hate you," he had repeated, his eyes never leaving the ground. Steve had felt something flutter inside him. "She told me so yesterday. She just said something about complicated and that you didn't actually do anything wrong but that she needed to protect herself from other people doing things, and yeah," Dustin had trailed off, letting a few pieces of meat fall from his hands.

Steve turned to look at the brunette ahead of them. It was hardly anything encouraging, what he had just been told, but it was enough. She didn't despise him, which was a start. As for the comment about protecting herself, he still couldn't figure out what he could have done to make her get hurt. The only thing he knew for certain was that it had to do with the party he had convinced her to go to, but he had gotten so wasted that night that everything was still a little fuzzy.

A few thoughts had run through his mind, but he knew Maddie would be the only one who could confirm anything. It scared him to ask. Steve could almost laugh at himself. *He* was scared of asking the five-foot-three girl next to him a simple question. He sent her another glance. Her eyes were still closed, and her lips were slightly parted now, and he had to wonder how all of this was weighing on her. Maddie's head lolled to the side and rested on his shoulder, making Steve feel frozen. It wasn't the first time she had fallen asleep on him (he would never let her live down sleeping through *The Outsiders* after she had *begged* him to go see it with her in the theater), but it was different somehow. He didn't want to wake her, but he also wasn't sure how she would feel when she realized she had used him for a pillow. The decision was made for him when a loud growling echoed through the junkyard.

Maddie shot up, bewildered as she looked around, trying to gather herself. Dustin jumped from his previous seat, pressing himself into Maddie's side as they looked through the metal bars that covered the window.

"You see him?" Dustin asked, his eyes continuing to dart around the darkened landscape.

Steve shook his head. "No."

Maddie found herself gripping her brother's arm, tensing as she waited for something to jump out at them. "Lucas, what's going on?"

The boy on the roof told them to hang on and Maddie tried to swallow her fear, hoping that nobody other than her could hear how hard and fast her heart was beating.

"I've got eyes on him! Ten o'clock! Te-Ten o'clock!" Lucas screamed, and the group shifted to get a glimpse of the creature.

Steve pointed through one of the squares they were peering through, tapping Maddie's shoulder as he directed her line of sight. "There."

"What's he doing?" Dustin asked, his voice shaky.

"I don't know," Steve replied, his eyes never leaving Dart.

"He's not taking the bait. Why isn't he taking the bait?" Maddie asked, keeping her voice low in case Dart could hear them.

Dustin shook his head. "Maybe he's not hungry?"

Steve swallowed hard. "Maybe he's sick of cow." He moved to stand, making Maddie and Dustin turn to look at him.

"Steve?" Maddie asked, following behind him as he walked over to the door.

"Steve, what are you doing?" Dustin said, confused.

Steve held up the lighter before tossing it to Dustin. "Just get ready."

Maddie grabbed Steve's arm as he went to open the door. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"He's not gonna come to us unless I offer him something better than raw steak or dead cat," Steve replied, grabbing his bat.

"I'm coming with you," she said, picking up a hockey stick that they had taken from the house.

Steve put a hand on the stick. "The hell you are. You stay here, you



watch them, and you make sure that when that thing gets into the trap, you light the son of a bitch up. Okay?"

"No, not okay," Maddie said, seething. "You're not going out there alone. You're gonna get yourself killed."

"I'll be fine, alright? I promise," Steve said, giving her one long look before stepping out of the door.

Maddie felt a pricking at the corner of her eyes as she shut the door behind him. She and Dustin quickly moved the window they had been looking out previously, finding Steve and watching him move closer to Dart. He whistled a few times, trying to get the creature to come to him.

"What's he doing?" Max asked as she came down the ladder and stood behind Dustin.

"Expanding the menu," Dustin replied, exchanging a glance with Maddie.

Steve called for Dart again, but Maddie moved away from the window, not able to watch anymore. A low chittering sounded, freezing her with fear. The events of last year flashed before her, and she suddenly felt nauseous.

"Steve! Watch out! Three o'clock!" Lucas voice rang out from the roof of the bus and Maddie ran to the window, trying to see what Lucas was talking about. Her heart dropped as she saw two more Darts creep on top of the cars.

Maddie pulled away and pulled the door open. "Steve!"

"Abort, abort!" Dustin screamed, but it was too late.

One of the dogs lunged at him, with Steve just barely missing it. All she could hear or see was absolute chaos. The kids were yelling and then pulling Steve into the bus and there was a dog at the door and Dustin was screaming into the mic and then there was nothing. A loud bang sounded from the roof and Maddie turned to see Max staring up at the hole above her. Maddie turned and grabbed her hockey stick and pushed herself in front of the younger girl. Steve

was saying something, but all she heard was the growling of the dog as it opened its mouth. Max screamed, and Maddie just gripped the stick tighter.

"Come on!" she screamed, hoping she seemed brave instead of fearful.

"Mads!" Steve yelled, lunging forward to push her out of the way, but it was over before it began. He threw the end of the bat out to hit something, but the dog had lifted its head up, screeching at something in the distance. The bus rocked as the dog jumped off, running towards the sound of the other animals growling in the distance. Steve kept his defensive posture for a few moments before he felt it was safe, straightening and loosening his grip on the bat. Maddie kept staring at the hole. He touched her arm gently, pulling her out of her trance.

"Hey, it's okay, they're gone," Steve said, making Maddie finally turn to look at him. "They're gone. We're safe. It's okay."

She dropped the hockey stick, breathing heavily. She turned towards Steve and he nodded at her. "We're okay."

"We're okay," she repeated. Maddie sniffled, putting her hand on her head. She closed her eyes, willing herself not to cry. Steve pulled her into a hug, and she buried her face in his chest as she took shaky breaths to calm herself down. "We're okay," he whispered, pressing his face into her hair.

---

"They're going somewhere," Steve said. "Let's get all the supplies from the bus and head out. I don't want to be here if they come back."

The kids were quick to listen, all the happier to get out of the junkyard. Steve and Maddie kept watch while they finished packing up.

"Thanks for that," she murmured, scanning through the fog. "I know I've been distant, and I definitely haven't been the best to you. So, thank you."

Steve chewed on his bottom lip, nodding. "You know I'm still here for

you, Maddie. Always."

"Yeah," she whispered, making Steve turn to her.

"Are you ever gonna be able to tell me what I did? I can take you being mad at me, but it's driving me crazy not knowing that I hurt you. Like, did I say something? Do something? Cause I keep trying to think back to that night, but it's like all I get is static," Steve said, shaking his head as he ran a hand through his hair.

Maddie bit her lip. "It wasn't you. I just-"

"Just what, Mads?" Steve asked, stepping towards her. "I'm still your best friend, you can tell me."

She took a shaky breath. Her mouth opened, but they were interrupted by the kids coming back with their stuff.

"Okay, we got it. Let's go," Dustin said, charging ahead before Steve jogged to catch up with him. Lucas was next to follow, leaving Max and Maddie to follow behind.

---

"Hey, uh, thanks, by the way," Max said, interrupting the quiet that had fallen over them.

Maddie furrowed her brows. "For what?"

"Well, you kinda put yourself on the line for me, back there. With that *thing*. And I know you barely know me, but I really appreciate it, so... thanks," Max rattled, finally coming to a stop when she repeated her gratitude.

"Anytime, Max," Maddie replied, sending the shorter girl a smile. The peacefulness they had been walking under was shattered by Steve's revelation that Dustin had kept Dart at the house. It only took a few words before the two boys erupted into another argument, with Max trying to get in the middle. The fight was only stopped by Steve yelling at them.

The whole group turned to look at him, following when he started moving towards the screeching noise he had heard. Max hung back.

"Guys why are we headed *towards* the sound?" she called, causing Maddie to backtrack.

"Don't worry, we'll figure something as we go. We improvise pretty much everything we do," she said, ushering the other girl along.

**A/N: I am literally the worst. I had absolutely no intention of this update taking a hundred million years, and I am so so sorry. I tried to make it extra long, so it would make up for it. ALSO! Steve/Maddie interaction that wasn't a fight! Woohoo! And can I just say how blown away I am? The feedback and support I've gotten on this story is just absolutely astonishing. I love y'all! As always, please let me know what you think in the comments and fave/follow for notifs if you haven't done so : ) Guest review responses!**

**Sukondis: TBH, that chapter is probably coming soon cause I need it ASAP**

**Castiel Angel Heart: I know! One of the main reasons for this fic is because I could never find enough on FF sites! I'm glad you're loving it.**

## 10. Chapter 10

"Shit! Dustin, give me the flashlight."

"No way, then I won't be able to see!"

"You guys are hogging all the light up there!"

There was a groan. "Just shut up and give her the flashlight, Dustin."

"Thank you, Lucas," Maddie said, smiling triumphantly as her brother handed over his flashlight.

She flicked it towards the ground, illuminating hers and Max's paths as they continued through the brush. They had been walking for a good half mile, and there was still no sign of the "demodogs" as Dustin had taken to calling the creatures. The noise they had been following was more sporadic now, with longer bouts of time in between each screech.

Steve held up a hand as they came to the edge of the tree line, signaling for them to stop. Maddie came to stand next to him, squinting through branches. She could hear the hum of a car engine, but she couldn't see the car. She took a few tentative steps forward, trying to get a glimpse of the vehicle. He soon joined her, their arms brushing together as they strode out of the woods and into a clear area.

"Who's there?" A familiar voice floated over to her and Maddie frowned, moving her flashlight in the direction of it.

"Steve?" Two voices chorused, and Maddie finally placed Nancy and Jonathan.

"Nancy?" He asked in return, his face slightly dropping when he recognized who was standing next to her. His disheartened look was not unnoticed by Maddie.

"Maddie?" Jonathan asked, quirking an eyebrow in her direction.

"Jonathan," Dustin said, his voice mirroring the confusion all seven of

them felt.

Steve kept walking downhill and Maddie struggled to keep up. She tripped when her foot hit loose dirt and Steve stopped to catch her, waiting for her to steady before continuing.

"What are you doing here?" Nancy asked, squinting slightly against the flashlight.

"What are *you* doing here?" Steve said in response, the two coming to a stop a few steps away from each other.

"We're looking for Mike and Will," Nancy said, lifting her chin defiantly.

"They're not in there are they?" Maddie asked quietly, and Dustin gestured to the lab.

Nancy gave the building an uneasy look before turning back to them. "We're not sure. Why?"

The question had barely left her mouth when an otherworldly screeching came from behind the gates. "That would be why," Maddie breathed, a sense of dread finding its way into her heart.

---

The boys had quickly started to devise a plan to get inside and rescue Mike and Will. The only problem being that both of their plans completely clashed, causing the third argument of the night to begin, each member of the group speaking over the other. Maddie was worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she listened to Steve and Jonathan recount the last time they had even seen Will when a glimmer of light caught her attention. She inched around the group, squinting her eyes to see if she was really seeing what she thought she saw.

"The power's back," she breathed. When the talking behind her continued, she turned around, facing them. "The power's back."

The talking only grew louder. Maddie rolled her eyes and whistled sharply. "Guys!"

The group finally quieted and looked at her. Nancy's eyes grew slightly rounder. "The-"

"Power's back. Yeah, that's what I've been trying to say. If we're making a move, we need to make it now," she continued, crossing her arms.

Jonathan immediately started towards the guard station, pressing the button frantically as the gates didn't so much as creak. Dustin pushed his way into the small station, stepping in front of Jonathan.

"Lemme try," he muttered, reaching towards the button. Jonathan started to protest but Dustin just shouted at the older boy before pressing the button the same way.

"Son of a bitch!" Dustin yelled, growing visibly agitated. Maddie shifted her weight, staring at the chain link in front of them and praying that it would open. Her little brother continued to push on the button when there was a loud buzzing, followed by the gate creeping open.

"Hey, I did it. I-I did it," Dustin said, sounding dazed as he chuckled and pointed at the gate.

"Okay, now what?" Steve asked, the group now staring at the opened gate.

Nancy and Jonathan exchanged glances before Jonathan spoke up. "We brought the car. We'll go in, see if there's anyone needing our help. If we can't find anything, we'll come back here and figure something out."

"Are you kidding me? You two are not going in there without back up or weapons or something!" Maddie said incredulously, gesturing wildly at the lab.

Nancy sent a soft smile to her friend. "We'll be fine, Maddie. If we need help, you'll know. You and Steve stay here with them and we'll be back, hopefully with Mike and Will." Maddie turned to Jonathan, hoping he would see how insane they sounded.

"Two minutes. Tops," he said quietly, nodding at her.

Maddie pressed her lips together, choosing to run a shaky hand through her dark waves rather than continue the argument. Jonathan and Nancy got in the car and took off down the dusty entry road, leaving the other five to wait impatiently.

---

Maddie had resorted to pacing in an effort to burn some of her nervous energy. There had been no signs of trouble, but Jonathan and Nancy had exceeded their two-minute mark by almost eight minutes. She started to wring her hands, trying to focus on something other than the possibility that her friends could be being eaten alive by demodogs right now. Steve was flipping a flashlight in his hands, his eyes flickering between her, the ground, and the road Jonathan and Nancy had disappeared down.

Max walked past Maddie, her focus fixated on the road. "You guys?" she said, causing the rest of them to turn in her direction.

Maddie heard the screeching of tires before she was blinded by headlights. Squinting, she put a hand up to help herself see when a hand wrapped around her arm and pulled her out of the car's path just before it squealed to a stop. She looked over to see Steve's appendage still curled around her bicep before she turned to the open window.

Hopper was waving them in as he put the van in park. "Let's go," he said, making sure the doors were unlocked. Steve opened the door, waving the kids in.

"Come on, get in, get in!" he said, frantically trying to get them all in the backseat. He closed the door as Dustin got in and opened the passenger's side for Maddie. "Up here, Mads."

She had barely gotten into the van when Steve jumped in after her, closing the door and patting the side. "Let's go!"

The van lurched forward, launching Maddie towards the windshield before Steve's arm reached around her and pulled her back. Right into his lap. She stuttered, trying to figure out if she should apologize or not, but she figured it wasn't really the time to be worried about where she was sitting. Especially seeing as Hopper was driving like a



bat out of hell, Jonathan following close behind him. She gripped Steve's arm tightly as they took the curve towards the Byers', their momentum almost throwing them off of the dirt road.

Everyone piled out of the van and car as the vehicles came to a stop, Maddie taking a count to make sure the entire group was accounted for. Hopper ushered a hysterical Joyce into the house and Maddie followed him, her heart still pounding from the drive. The chief turned to her as they entered the living room.

"You take care of her. I have some people to call," he said, his voice solemn as Maddie nodded.

She went to stand by Joyce. The older woman was standing stock still, staring at the corner of the living room, her face tear-streaked and exhausted. Maddie led the woman to one of the bedrooms, quietly trying to soothe her as she wrapped a knitted blanket around Joyce's shoulders.

"Joyce? Hey, everything's okay now. We're back at your house. Will's here, Hopper's here, Jonathan's here. We're all here. It's gonna be okay," she said, stroking Joyce's hair as she tried to help her calm.

Joyce suddenly looked at Maddie, her eyes welling up with tears again. "He-He-He's just gone. He's gone. I should've saved him," she said, taking a stuttering breath. "I should've told him to keep running."

Maddie furrowed her brows, shaking her head slightly. "Who? Who should you have saved?"

Joyce began to sob again. "I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. Oh, God, what did I do? I shouldn't have dragged him into this. I *promised* I wouldn't drag him into this life."

A wave of realization washed over Maddie. "Oh, God."

She sat back on her heels. Bob. He had been at the lab. Of course, he was at the lab, he would have never left Joyce's side if she had had to take Will. She suddenly felt nauseous. Bob was gone. She returned her focus to Joyce, who had quieted but still had tears rolling down

her face.

"Hey, it's not your fault," she said, using her jacket sleeve to help wipe Joyce's tears. "It's not your fault. It's gonna be okay," she shushed the older woman as they embraced each other.

---

Deciding Joyce needed some alone time, Maddie quietly shut the bedroom door and made her way to the kitchen. Hopper was reciting a telephone number as he leaned against the wall and the kids were seated around the kitchen table. Maddie went to the cupboard with the glasses, feeling dazed as she turned on the faucet to fill up one of the cups. She stared out the window, her eyes darting over the woods as if she half-expected a demodog to creep out at any moment. Something cold ran over her hand and she dimly heard Steve's voice in the background.

Steve turned towards Maddie, saying her name again when she didn't respond to him. She didn't move from her position at the sink, her eyes still transfixed on the distant trees. He stepped over to her, glancing at the kids before looking down. Her glass was full, overflowing even, but she didn't shut the water off. Steve said her name once more, gently removing the cup from her hands and turning the faucet off. She finally turned to look at him, her eyes losing their glaze as his fingers brushed over hers. He quietly led her to one of the back rooms, getting her to sit before he squatted in front of her, meeting her eyes. Maddie looked up at him.

"Kevin McHartney."

Steve looked taken aback. "What?"

"Kevin. McHartney," she said again, her lower lip starting to tremble.

"What about him?" Steve asked, carefully treading with his words.

"That night. The party. Do you remember introducing us?" she asked, tears starting to burn her eyes as she tried to blink them back.

Steve nodded, not sure where Maddie was going with her questions. She sniffled and combed her hair back. He tried to meet her eyes, but

she kept turning away from him.

"And do you remember what happened after you went outside?" Her voice was quiet, almost a whisper.

Steve sat back on his heels, trying to think. He remembered the beer pong game, everyone cheering loudly as his opponent chugged a cup. He had gone back inside for a refill. Looked for Maddie and Kevin. Had seen the aforementioned boy going... Going where? Had he left? Gone outside? Steve's stomach dropped a bit when he realized he had seen Kevin climbing the stairs, Maddie not far in front of him. His eyes grew a tad rounder as he looked over at Maddie. Her eyes were focused on the floor rather than looking at him.

"Did he-" Steve couldn't bring himself to finish his question. Maddie's silence was enough of an answer for him. "Jesus," he breathed, raking a hand through his hair and tugging on the ends.

"I'm going to kill him," Steve said, his voice dangerously calm.

"It's not your fault, Steve," she said, shaking her head.

His jaw tensed. "God, Maddie. I'm so sorry. I had no idea. I should have never made you go to that stupid party. Goddammit," he took a deep breath and dragged a hand over his face.

Maddie just nodded, willing the tears rolling down her face to stop. Steve hesitantly wrapped his arms around her, pulling her closer to him. She buried her face in the crook of his neck and allowed herself a few moments of vulnerability.

Steve rocked slightly, holding the back of her head with his hand. "I'm so, so sorry," he repeated, whispering to her as he tightened his arms.

He knew his apology was worth nothing compared to what he had put her through. But it was all he could offer at the moment.

It was all he had left to give her.

**A/N: I don't really like this chapter, to be honest. It felt like a filler, so I'm terribly sorry if it felt like that to y'all too. These**

next few chapters will be focusing on the last two episodes of Season 2. I have a few ideas of where to go after that since we don't have Season 3 yet, but we'll burn that bridge when we get to it. Please let me know in the comments section what you think! Reviews always make me smile and I am always appreciative of the support. Much love to all of y'all! Now for guest review responses:

Lisa: I'm so glad you love the story! I'm terribly sorry for making you wait so long, but I hope this chapter came quickly enough for you!

## 11. Chapter 11

They had returned to the kitchen after Maddie had managed to calm herself and Steve was able to think without rage clouding his vision. Hopper was angrily speaking on the phone, his tone making it obvious that the person on the other line didn't quite believe him. He hung up, slamming the phone into the hook before running a hand over his face.

"They didn't believe you, did they?" Dustin asked, his tone grim.

Hopper turned to them. "We'll see."

"We'll see? We can't just sit here while those things are loose!" Mike said, his voice laced with disbelief as he threw his hands up.

"We stay here, and we wait for help," Hopper replied firmly, making it clear that his decision was final. He turned down the hall and started in the direction of where Joyce was.

"What are we going to do?" Maddie whispered, tossing a glance over her shoulder towards the kids. "We can't stay here forever."

Steve sighed, crossing his arms over his chest. "I know, we just don't have a better plan than that right now. We might as well wait to see if Hopper's back up shows up or not."

Mike had started talking, going on a tangent about Bob starting the AV club. He put something on the table and Maddie glanced back at the table before returning her gaze to the window. She turned her head to Steve as the kids started arguing over "demodogs".

"Hopper's back up isn't coming, Steve," she said lowly, aware of just how cynical she sounded.

He nodded, his lips pressed into a thin line. "We need to get the kids out. Will needs somewhere safe. Hell, we all need somewhere safe."

"His army," she heard Mike say.

The two turned towards the table when a silence fell over the

kitchen.

"What do you mean?" Steve asked, his eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

"His army. Maybe if we stop him, we can stop his army, too," Mike said, looking dazed before running out of the kitchen and down the hall towards Will's room. He was shuffling papers around as the rest of the group caught up with him before thrusting a drawing into Max's hands.

"The shadow monster," Dustin said, confusion evident in his tone.

"It got Will that day on the field. The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him," Mike explained.

"And so, this virus, it's connecting him to the tunnels?" Maddie asked, trying to make sense of what Mike was trying to say.

"To the tunnels, monsters, the Upside Down, everything," he replied, his pitch getting higher and the words spilling out quicker the more he tried to tell the group what he was thinking.

"Whoa. Slow down, slow down," Steve said, holding a hand up to get Mike to explain himself in a clear voice.

"Okay, so, the shadow monster's inside everything. And if the vines feel something like pain, then so does Will," Mike said, turning to Lucas and Max.

"And so, does Dart," Lucas responded, realization dawning on his face.

"Yeah, like what Mr. Clarke taught us. The hive mind," Mike said, nodding excitedly now that someone was catching on.

"Hive mind?"

"A collective consciousness," Dustin and Maddie chorused. "It's a super-organism," Maddie finished for her brother.

"And this is the thing that controls everything. It's the brain," Mike

said, waving the picture in his hand.

"Like the mind flayer," Dustin said softly, making the other boys nod in agreement.

"The what?"

---

Dustin tossed the manual for Dungeons and Dragons onto the table, pointing at an illustration of an odd-looking monster. "This is the mind flayer."

"What the hell is that?" Hopper asked, his tone indicating he knew that he would regret asking this question.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension. It's so ancient that it doesn't even know its true home," Dustin explained, obviously a little excited that his area of expertise was coming into play at last. "Okay, it enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly-developed psionic powers."

"Oh, my God, none of this is real," Hopper said, pinching the bridge of his nose exasperatedly. "This is a kids' game."

"No, it's a manual," Dustin clarified, sounding offended. "And it's not for kids. And unless you know something that we don't, this is the best metaphor-"

"Analogy," Lucas corrected.

"Analogy? That's what you're worried about? Fine. An analogy for understanding whatever the hell this is," Dustin said, obviously incredulous at Lucas for correcting his grammar.

"Okay, so this mind flamer-" Nancy began.

"*Flayer*. Mind *flayer*," Dustin said, making Nancy roll her eyes.

"What does it want?" she continued.

"To conquer us, basically. It believes it's the master race," Dustin explained.

"Like the Germans?" Steve interjected, making Maddie smirk next to him.

"You mean the Nazis?" she said softly and Steve looked embarrassed.

"Yeah, the Nazis," he repeated, looking at her a beat longer than was necessary before returning his focus to Dustin.

"If the Nazis were from another dimension, then yeah, totally. Uh, it views other races, like us, as inferior to itself," Dustin continued, his tone finally calmer.

"It wants to spread, take over other dimensions," Mike added.

"We are talking about the destruction of our world as we know it," Lucas said, oblivious to the looks of panic that spread around the table at his words.

"That's great. That's great. That's really great," Steve said, pulling the ends of his hair. "Jesus!" he breathed, turning away from the table. Maddie reached a hand out to his back, feeling him tense before relaxing into her touch.

"Okay, so if this thing is like a brain that's controlling everything, then what happens if we kill it?" Maddie said, her attention turning to the book that was still open in front of her brother.

"We kill everything it controls," Mike answered.

"We win," Dustin said, realizing what Maddie was insinuating.

"Theoretically," Lucas reminded them, obviously still cautious about the whole idea.

"Great. So how do you kill this thing? Shoot it with fireballs or something?" Hopper asked, taking the book from Maddie.

Dustin chuckled. "No. No, fireballs," he said, his smile dropping when he saw the look on Hopper's face.

"You summon an undead army because zombies, y'know... They don't have brains and the mind flayer, it likes brains," Dustin stammered,



trailing off as he realized how ridiculous he sounded. "It's just a game."

Hopper threw the manual down in frustration, turning away from the group. "What the hell are we even doing here?"

"I thought we were waiting for your military backup," Dustin retorted.

Maddie sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose as the kitchen devolved into a shouting match about what to do and what they knew. She felt a comforting hand on her shoulder that she knew to be Steve's as a headache began to form.

"They're right," a rough voice said. Maddie looked up to see Joyce huddled in the corner with the blanket still wrapped around her shoulders. "We have to kill it," she continued, looking at Hopper. The blanket slipped from her shoulders as the look on her face grew determined.

"I *want* to kill it," she said, clenching her fists at her side.

"Me, too, Joyce, okay? But how do we do that? We don't exactly know what we're dealing with here," Hopper reasoned

"No, but he does," Mike said, turning towards the living room. He took a few steps towards where Will was still sleeping. "If anyone knows how to destroy this thing, it's Will. He's connected to it, so he'll know its weaknesses."

"I thought we couldn't trust him anymore, that he's a spy for the mind flayer," Maddie said, crossing her arms against her chest.

"Yeah, but he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is," Mike said quietly, catching Hopper's attention.

"How do you mean?"

---

Thirty minutes later, Maddie found herself carrying boxes of old toys, tools, and just general junk away from the front of the Byers's storage shed. Hopper had assigned everyone tasks to set up the shed as an

"interrogation space", his face grim at the term. She set one particularly heavy box down with a grunt, wiping grime from her hands onto her already filthy jeans. Her next job was to sort through the boxes to find anything that might be useful to them. She glanced up at the crashing of metal to see Dustin and Lucas sorting through a trash can.

Maddie was glad the boys had stopped arguing; she hated seeing any of them fight. The brunette gave a small smile at the scene before carrying an assortment of cloths towards the shed. She paused at the sight of Nancy and Steve talking, the latter smirking as he responded to the other girl. Maddie felt her heart drop ever so slightly at the sight, though if someone had asked she wouldn't have been able to explain why. A frown tugged at the edge of her mouth as she watched the two interact. She cleared her throat to announce her presence, making Steve wobble dangerously on the stepladder as he turned to see her.

"I brought these," she said, holding up the strips of cloth in her arms. "I thought they might help or whatever," she mumbled, dumping the pile out onto the table next to her before leaving.

She returned to the pile of boxes, blinking rapidly as inexplicable tears threatened to gather in the corner of her eyes. "Get *over* yourself, Mads," she berated herself quietly, furious that she was letting herself be this affected by it.

Maddie sniffed before squatting to sort through another box of junk, pausing for a moment when a tall shadow fell over her. She looked up to see Jonathan standing over her, his hands in his pockets. They sat in silence for a moment before he kneeled next to her and helped her sort things into piles.

"You okay?" she asked, her voice slightly hoarse after the day's events.

Jonathan shrugged. "I mean, is anybody? Are you?"

Maddie shrugged back. "Could be better, could also be in a demogorgon's stomach," she said, a humorless smile not quite reaching her face.

Jonathan nodded solemnly and the two continued to pick through the boxes.

"But really Jon, I mean, you think nobody noticed when you and Nance disappeared from school for a few days? And then when you do come back, it's to this mess. I mean really, are you alright? If you want someone to talk to, you know I'm always-"

"I kissed Nancy," he suddenly blurted.

Maddie froze. Jonathan stared at her, waiting anxiously for a response.

"Oookayyy," she said slowly, trying to formulate a response to his sudden confession. "Um, when?"

"The other night. We were at this conspiracy theorist's house, which is a long story by the way, and we were drunk, like *really* drunk, and one thing led to another, and I-I kissed her," he said, slightly pink in the face.

He watched carefully for her expression as Maddie sat back on her heels. "Okay. Uh, have you guys talked about it?"

Jonathan blushed even deeper and stammered. "We-Well, we- It kind of- We might have-"

Maddie raised an eyebrow and Jonathan sighed. "We went a little further than just kissing."

"And how much farther is that?" Maddie asked cautiously.

"Like, all the way," Jonathan said.

"WHAT!?" Maddie yelped, making Jonathan hold his hands up and look around wildly.

Maddie regained her composure before swatting his arm. "You did *what*?" she hissed.

"I know, I know," he said, running a hand through his hair. "And now it's kind of awkward but I want to know how she feels, because I

know how I feel, but it's just *weird* now, and being at war with the Mind Flayer while Will is caught in the middle isn't exactly an ideal time to talk about it but I needed to get it out."

She just nodded in response. "I mean, I'm happy for you if that's what both of you want, it's just a big leap from not being able to tell her how you feel to... *that*."

Jonathan dipped his head. "Can you just keep it between us for now though? I don't want Steve to find out and him feel weird about all this, especially since they just broke up--"

"Wait, they're *broken up* broken up?" Maddie asked, feeling stupid even as the question tumbled from her mouth. Of course they were; Steve had been at the Wheeler's with roses, Nancy had disappeared after the Halloween party, and Blaire had mentioned it to her at lunch. She had just thought they were rumors or that it was a split for a few days before they got back together at the end of the week.

"Yeah, Nancy ended it the day after the Halloween party. The whole school was talking about it, how have you not heard?" Jonathan asked. Maddie shook her head, chuckling softly.

"You know me Jon, I'm oblivious. But if they were broken up before you and her, *y'know*, then I don't see what the problem is. I think it's a little fast personally, but as long as you're happy."

Jonathan sent a small grin; the first one Maddie had seen in a long time. "Thanks, Maddie. You're a good friend, you know that?"

"I do now that you've told me," she responded, winking at him before straightening. "Alright, I'm gonna take this stuff to the shed. Can you take the rest to the burn pile?"

"Yeah, I got it," Jonathan replied, gathering the discarded items in his arm and heading towards the growing pile of junk in the backyard. Maddie took the much smaller number of items they had saved and started in the direction of the shed.

She nodded in approval as she stepped inside. The windows were blacked out with old curtains and sheets, the floor had been covered

in tattered blankets, and the walls were currently being covered with cardboard that was being stapled in place by Steve.

"Love what you've done with the place," she said dryly, making Steve turn in her direction. He smirked.

"Thanks. I've been meaning to redecorate for a while now, but you know, I never have the time," he quipped, stepping off his stool to take a step towards her.

Maddie lifted her armful of supplies. "I come bearing gifts."

"I see that. Mind if I take them off your hands?"

She transferred the cardboard and rags into his hands and he set them onto the table behind him. Steve picked up a piece of cardboard and held it out towards her. "Mind lending me a hand?"

She took the cardboard and followed him to his previous position, holding the cardboard in place so he could staple it. The thick silence was broken only by the sound of the staple gun and crinkling of cardboard.

"Want to switch?" Maddie asked after the right wall had been entirely covered. Steve nodded.

"Sure. If you're tall enough to reach," he said, dodging Maddie's punch as he laughed at her.

She pouted at him, sticking her lip out. "Be nice to me," she whined, making Steve's smile grow wider.

"But messing with you is so much more fun," he said, giving her a shit-eating grin as he held a piece of cardboard up on the wall.

They fell back into silence, though it was much lighter now. Maddie pressed the staple gun to the wall and squeezed the trigger, nodding in satisfaction as it stuck in place. They continued down the wall until Maddie decided to break the silence again.

"I'm sorry."

Steve paused from aligning the cardboard. "For what?" he asked, his expression puzzled.

"I took it out on you," she responded quietly, focusing on the staples again. "It's not your fault, what happened. But I blamed you for it, and it wasn't fair of me. You needed me and I shut you out. So, I'm sorry."

"Maddie, you don't have to apologize to me for that. You were going through something, I understand that now. You can't blame yourself for anything. The only person at fault here is *him*. I just want you to be happy again," Steve said softly, dropping the cardboard so he could turn to her.

Maddie smiled at him, wiping at her eyes for the second time that night. "Ugh, I hate crying like this," she said, trying to lighten the situation. She laughed. "I probably look a mess."

Steve grinned. "I think you look like a million bucks," he said, making her reach down to shove his shoulder.

"Oh, shut up, Harrington," she said, pressing the staples into the wall once again.

"You first, Henderson," he replied in a mocking tone, making her roll her eyes as she leaned out to staple the corner.

"Why don't you-" she started before she was cut off by her own scream as she toppled off the stool.

Maddie screwed her eyes shut, bracing herself for a fall that never came. Instead, she felt two arms wrapped around her waist and under her knees. Cautiously, she opened her eyes to see Steve's mahogany ones staring back at her. She swallowed hard at their proximity, noting that Steve did nothing to loosen his grip. They stayed in that position for what seemed like eons until Dustin's voice carried through the doorway.

"I'm gonna see if Steve needs any help!"

Steve hastily put her down and Maddie straightened her ponytail, both of them awkwardly stepping away from each other. Dustin

appeared at the door several moments later.

"Oh, hey Mads. I didn't know you were in here. D'you guys need any help?" he asked, obviously oblivious to the incident that had just occurred.

The two babbled over each other before falling silent, Steve clearing his throat. "Yeah, you can hold the cardboard while I staple."

Dustin gave him a grin. "Sweet."

Maddie handed him a piece of cardboard to hold and he frowned at her. "Maddie why is your face all pink?"

**A/N: SURPRISE! I'm not dead! Hey guys! I've missed you! How are you? How are your lives going?**

**I'm honestly so, so sorry for taking so long to update (4 months!) Truth be told, I wasn't particularly motivated to write for it, but then inspiration struck a while ago and I almost finished this chapter in one go. And then it got deleted. So, I had to start all over. Which sucks a lot. Anywho, I hope this chapter was worth the wait! I know it's a lot of dialogue but there were things that needed to get worked out and I felt like characters talking through them was the best way to go about it, plus I had to tie in the dialogue from the show.**

**Also, I just want to recognize a very special review that pretty much motivated me to get off my lazy butt and write something – SkyFl0w3r, your review and kind words helped me want to write! I was feeling down about this story and that I wasn't writing it as well as my other one and your review made me feel like I was doing good, so thank you!**

**Please fave/follow if you haven't already guys and leave a review telling me what you liked/didn't like/want me to know since I left/angry words that you want to say since I disappeared. Guest reviews!**

**Lisa – I'm glad they're back together too! Luckily everyone is happier in a few chapters : )**

**Shawny – I'm sorry if I killed you with anticipation! Hopefully this will revive you!**

**Guest – I'm glad you're enjoying it! I hope you see this chapter : )**